IN THE MAG: WORLD-EXCLUSIVE FEATURE

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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FOR OVER 20 YEARS
ISSUE 258

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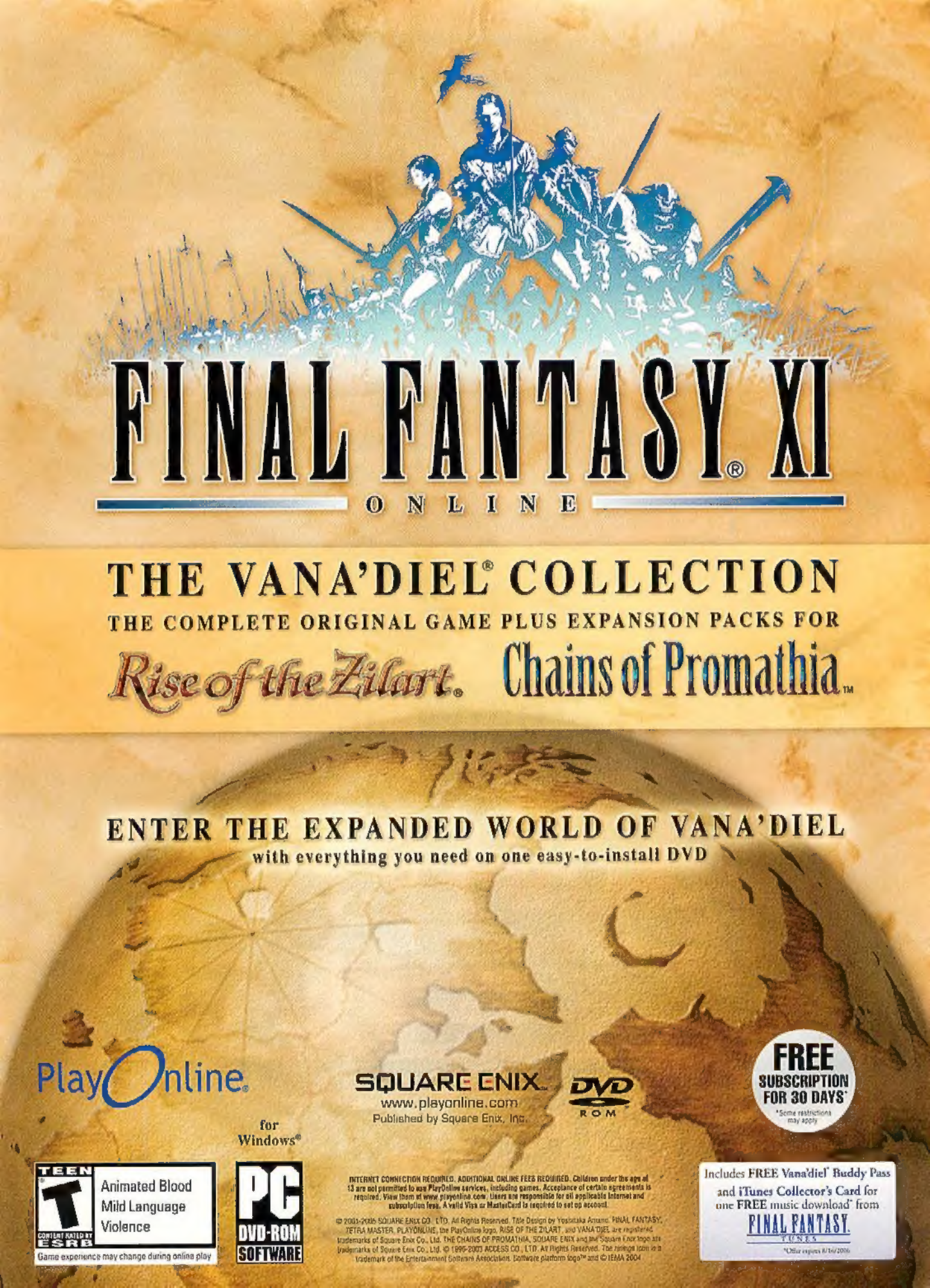
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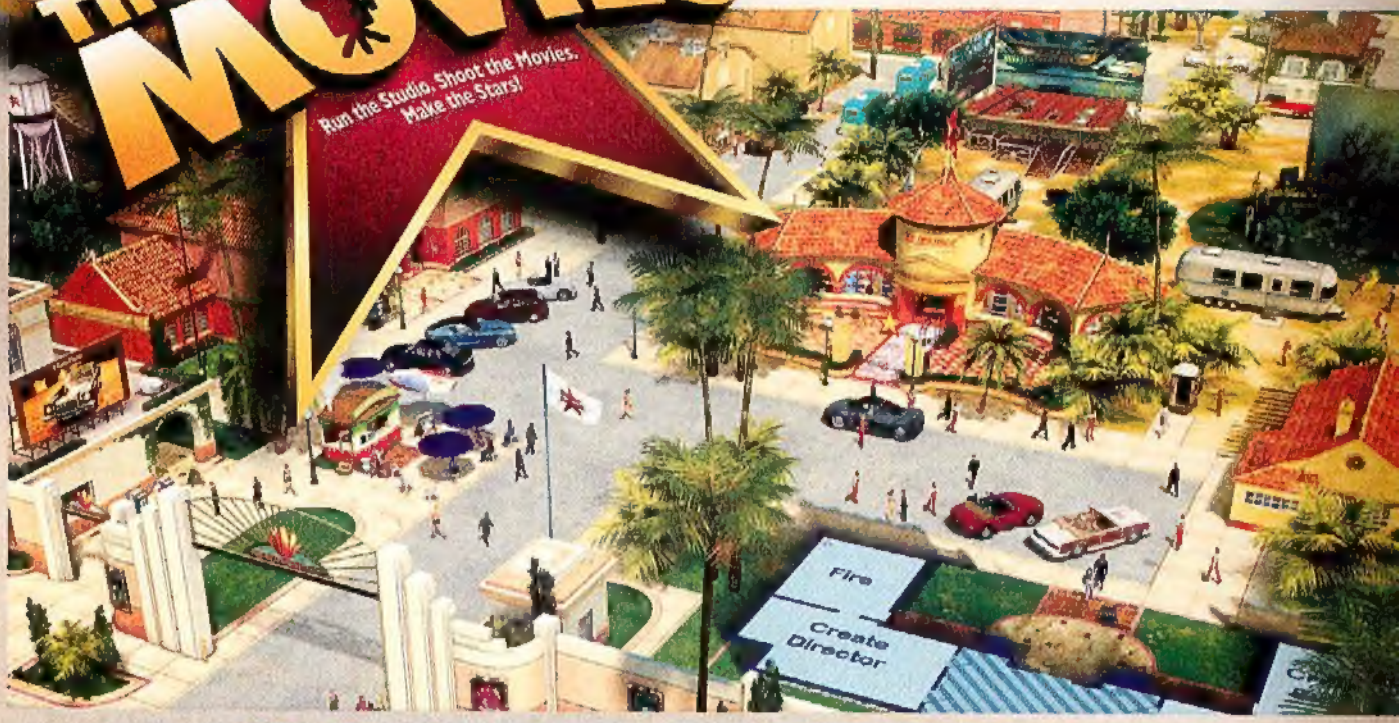

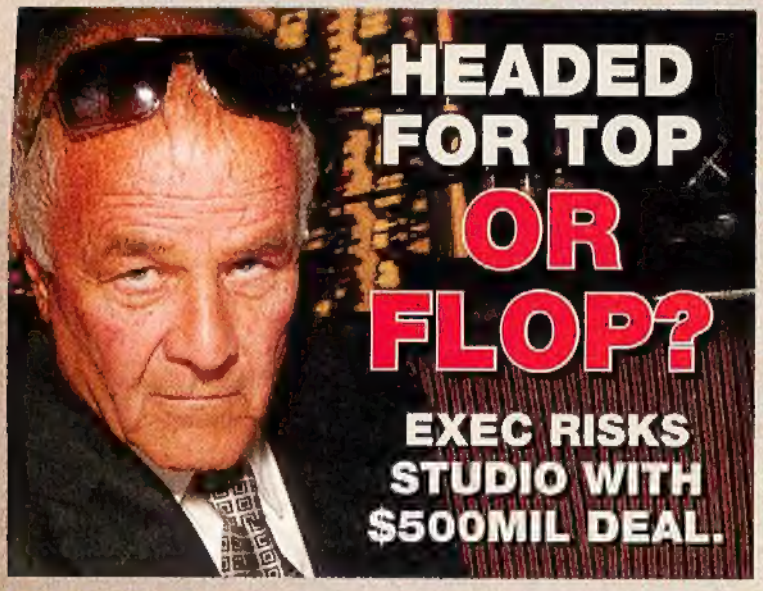

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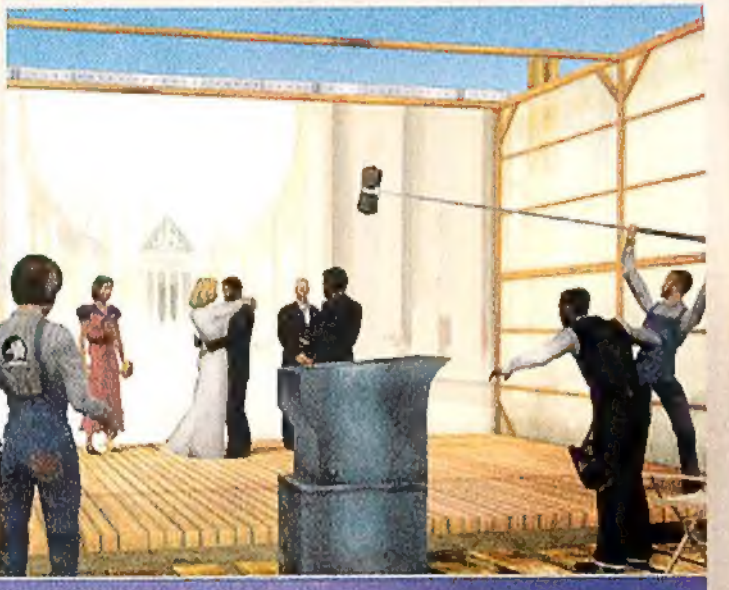

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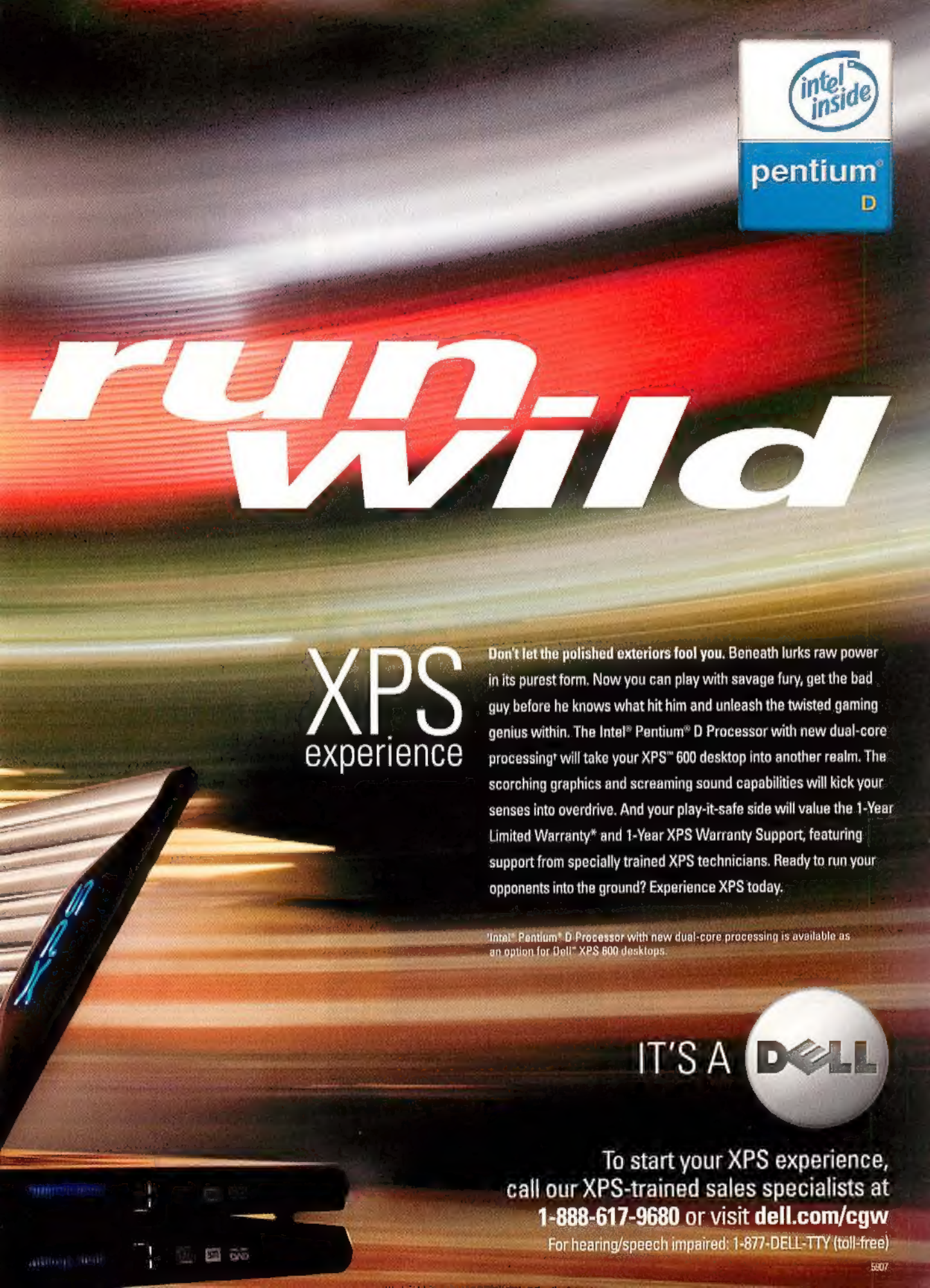
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COVER STORY

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

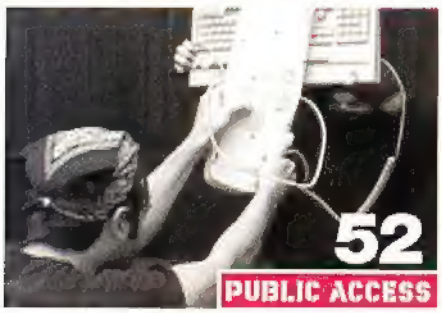
How does *Quake* make the jump from claustrophobic corridors to the great outdoors? This month's cover-story scoop blows the doors off of *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* and examines why it's more than just a sci-fi-slanted *Battlefield 2* killer.

14 Editorial

A great man once said: "Fool me once...shame on you. Fool me...you can't get fooled again." Our equally bewildered boss has this in mind as he ponders the *Star Wars Galaxies* "reboot."

16 Letters

You don't send us flowers, you don't write us love songs...but you do complain to us about everything on the planet. Thanks!



20 Radar

Curious about what happened at Blizzard's first-annual BlizzCon? Want to see what goes on at *Battlefield 2* boot camp? Wondering what games to get for the little ones in your life? We tell you all this and more in this month's Radar section.

81 Reviews

It's shooter month at *CGW*, as we deliver the goods on *Quake 4*, *Call of Duty 2*, *F.E.A.R.*, and *Star Wars Battlefront II*. Plus, we gush over *Civilization IV*, the sequel to one of our favorite strategy games.

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116 Tom vs. Bruce

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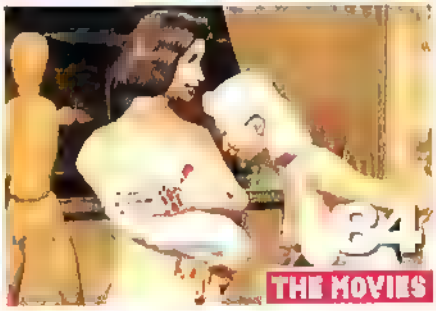
122 Scorched Earth

All good dogs go to heaven—but you get to live a hell on Earth.



THIS MONTH ON 1UP.COM

CGWJEFF.1UP.COM

Could it be true? Is *CGW* editor-in-chief Jeff Green two-timing on *WOW* with 2003 Coaster of the Year *Star Wars Galaxies*?

FPSADDICTS-CLUB.1UP.COM

This one's for all the *Counter-Strike* and *Quake* junkies out there. With more than 1,600 members and counting, the FPS Addicts club has no shortage of eager opponents.

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EDITORIAL 258

SMELLS LIKE BANTHA

Star Wars Galaxies to fans: OMG! You're right! Our game stinks!

AS MY OLD FRIEND ANNIE HALL USED TO SAY, "Well, la de da. La de da." This was my first reaction to hearing about the big changes coming to *Star Wars Galaxies*, Sony Online's massively disappointing MMORPG, which launched two and a half years ago and has been bumming out gamers ever since.

That "la-de-da" is meant to convey pleasant surprise. Because what we have here is the rare occasion of a game publisher admitting to the world, "We blew it," and then doing something about it. Without getting into the details, which you can read about inside this issue, Sony has essentially decided to "reboot" the game, giving players an entirely different experience—this time with fun added!

It's way too early to assess whether it will work or not, but here's a thumbs-up to Sony Online for at least acknowledging the problem and trying to fix it. Of course, Sony's primary motivation is less a selfless desire to please fans and game journalists than it is to keep making money and not lose more potential players to *WOW* and other MMOs. But still. If any game has a right to be better than it is, it's *Star Wars Galaxies*. So thank goodness Sony is giving it another try—even at the risk of alienating the existing player base (composed largely, one would assume, of masochists) that has stuck with it all this time.

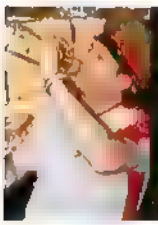
The larger issue for *CGW* is how we cover online games like this that go through massive changes—or even smaller changes introduced in patches. Do we review them again? Do we abandon the notion of one "definitive review" and keep revisiting them over time? How, indeed, do you judge a game that is essentially never finished? It's mysteries such as these that truly make my job a pain in the freakin' tush...err, I mean, a lot of fun. What would Yoda do?

/ JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Now Playing: *Call of Duty 2, Battlefield 2, Civ4*
1UP.com Blog: cgwjeff.1UP.com

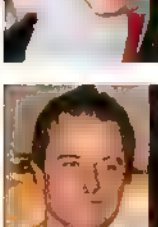
CGW SPECIAL OPS

KRISTEN SALVATORE
MANAGING EDITOR
Class: Action
Role: Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy or Musical
Gear: Iron Lung Constitution
Special Ability: Getting all up in your grill
Now Playing: *Star Wars Galaxies*
1UP.com Blog: kristensa.1UP.com

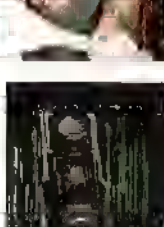


DARREN "HANNIBAL" GLADSTONE
SENIOR EDITOR (FEATURES)
Class: None whatsoever
Role: Offensive offense
Gear: Plastic guitar, plastic gun
Special Ability: Face rocking
Now Playing: *Guitar Hero III, Rock Band, F.E.A.R.*
1UP.com Blog: cgw_darren.1UP.com

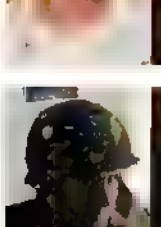
RYAN SCOTT
EDITOR (REVIEWS)
Class: 14th level Rogue/Wizard
Role Roll: +10 to hit; 1d6+2 damage
Gear: Thundering Staff +2; Eye of Vecna; Cloak of Protection +3
Special Ability: Sneak Attack +4d6; Lightning Bolt
Now Playing: Nearly fabulous RPGs
1UP.com Blog: cgw_ryan.1UP.com



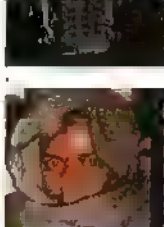
SHAWN ELLIOTT
EDITOR (PREVIEWS)
Class: Low
Role: Played out
Gear: High
Special Ability: Talk tough talk; kick jerk toys
Now Playing: *Call of Duty 2, Fast Cars, Danger, Fire, and Knives*
1UP.com Blog: cgmshawn.1UP.com



LOGAN PARR
DISC PRODUCER
Class: Hacker
Role: Reconnaissance
Gear: Overcoat, shades, cell phone
Special Ability: Bend time/dodge bullets
Now Playing: *The Matrix: Path of Neo, Star Wars Battlefront II*
1UP.com Blog: logans_run.1UP.com



MICHAEL JENNINGS
ART DIRECTOR
Class: Stealth
Role: Support, Demolition
Gear: Mind bullets
Special Ability: Levitation
Now Playing: *F.E.A.R.*
1UP.com Blog: cgw_jennings.1UP.com



SEAN DALLASKIDD
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
Class: "Special"
Role: Desert Rat
Gear: Hulk demolition gloves
Special Ability: Flower arrangements, swift kicks to the groin
Now Playing: *Tenchu: Fatal Shadows, Stubbs the Zombie*
1UP.com Blog: The_dallaskidd.1UP.com

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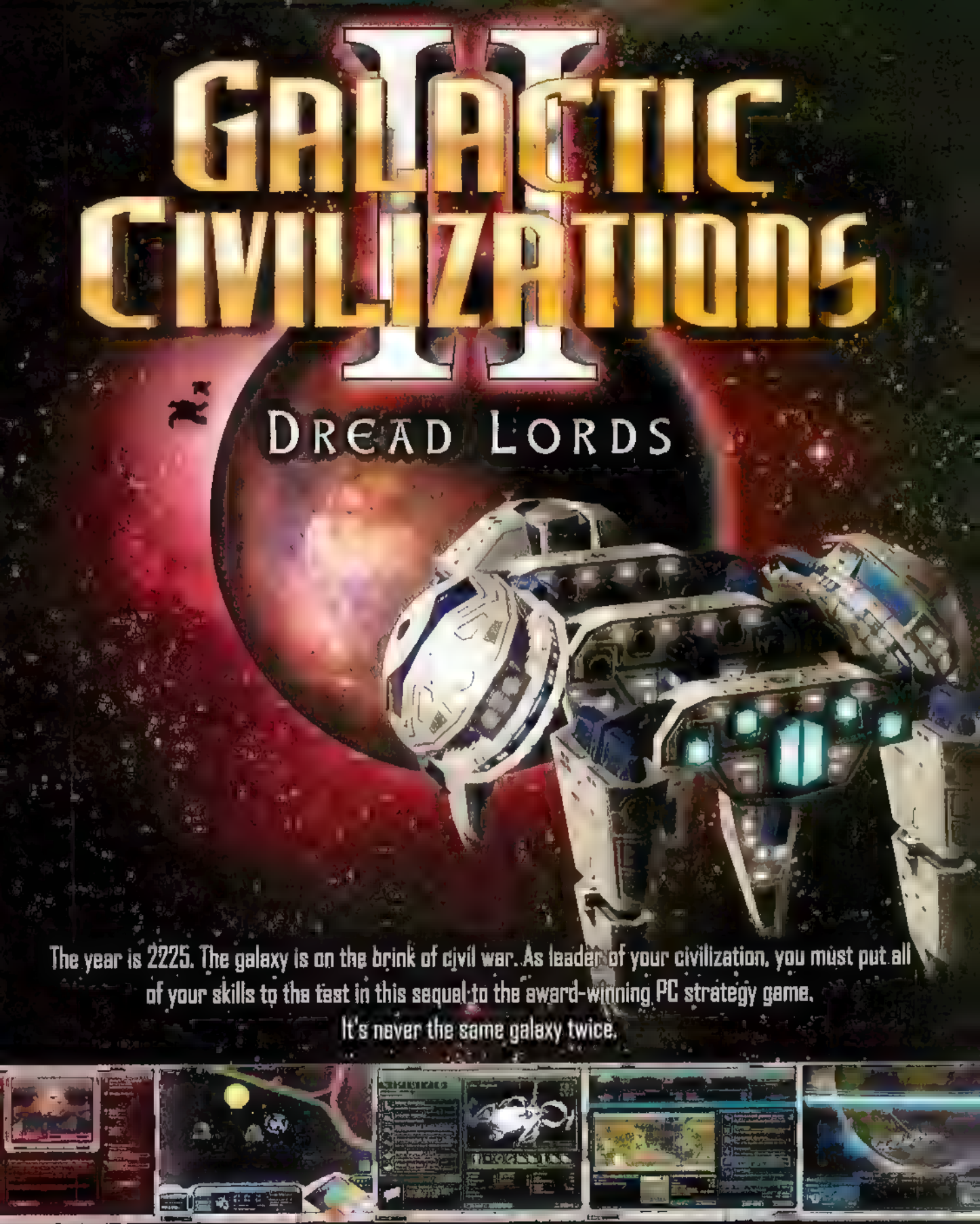

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LETTERS

ISSUE 258

WTF? OMG! STFU, N00B! KTHXBYE.

EMPIRE STRIKES OUT

Sony Online Entertainment ripped me off, along with the rest of *Star Wars Galaxies*' fans. In November, it sold us the *Trials of Obi-Wan* expansion. New planet, Mustafar! New loot to enhance our professions! Personally, as a creature handler, I was interested in a creature handler necklace that would allow me to tame more powerful pets.

Then, the day after the expansion's release, SOE and LucasArts announced that soon, my profession, along with many others, will no longer exist. They knew for months that professions would be eliminated (posts on their boards say they've been working on this for over a year) but still advertised loot that would help those same professions and got us to buy a useless expansion for $30. Adding insult to injury, the creature handler necklace never even appeared in the game. Isn't that fraud?

Last I checked, SOE isn't answering any posts about players wanting their money back. I know I do.

Kelly Kirchner

This, unbelievably, is one of the more polite e-mails we've gotten regarding the big *Star Wars Galaxies* switchover—and we've been buried in 'em since the news broke. For the record, Sony Online Entertainment and LucasArts did offer a refund to anyone with a *Galaxies* account in good standing who purchased the *Trials of Obi-Wan* before November 3. On the other hand, once you get past the part that puts years of your character's progress down the tube, the *Galaxies*-to-be is actually worth a second look (see story on page 26).

CIVIL UNREST

I understand the need to cut costs, but what's with game packaging nowadays? I was irritated when they started swapping CD jewel cases for cardboard sleeves that didn't fit in my CD storage slots. I'm furious now. With *Civilization IV* (great game, by the way), I didn't even get the irritating cardboard sleeve! I got an insulting, bland CD envelope. What's worse is that I don't even get a manual anymore; I get another CD-ROM in another witless blank envelope, and that's supposed to be my manual.

Mark Fischer

Should we tell Mark that we're shipping our February CD-ROMs inside origami swans?

OPEN WINDOWS

I keep hearing about how Mr. Gates wants Vista to be a gamers' paradise. Pardon my skepticism, but isn't this the same guy who prevented development of the much-anticipated *Halo 2* for the PC? Here's a bit of advice: Put together a proper DOS emulator for old games in Vista. Ah, the glory days of EMM386 and HIMEMSYS. Punks today don't know how good they have it, not having to juggle separate boot-up floppies for each game.

I. Hayes

What he said.

I, PATCH

I'm beginning to disagree with your reasoning on not reviewing patched games. When it comes down to it, I'm less interested in the game I get from a retailer than I am in the game that I end up playing with its available patches. Really, who doesn't have Internet access these days?

We can debate the "ship now, patch later" mentality till we're blue in the face, but the fact remains that every game is patched sooner or later, and if a patch significantly improves or enhances a game, why not say so? I'm not suggesting that you rereview games after each and every patch, but why not add a paragraph or two about how the latest (at press time) patches alter products and factor that into the final review scores? Rather than misleading readers, it gives us the whole story.

K.L.

Reviews editor Ryan Scott chimes in: Not all patches are bad. But we believe they should address unforeseen technical issues (such as videocard driver stability problems or very rare bugs) or supply bonus postrelease content, instead of fixing fundamentally broken games that get rushed out the door (case in point: Ubisoft announced *Far Cry*'s first patch in the very same press release that confirmed the game's gold shipping status). Here's something to chew on: Console developers have to get it right the first time, so what makes PC developers any different?

That said, turn to our new Next Level page, which was specifically created to examine major patches, fan-made mods, and other postrelease goodies.

PRICE CHECK, AISLE 2

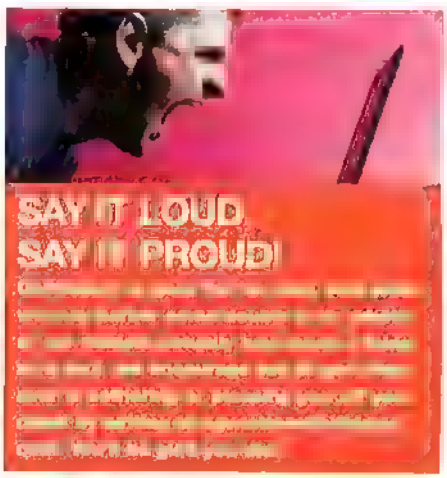
I'm considering buying a videocard that I saw in *CGW*. Problem is, I can't find it anywhere for the low price you list in the Tech section. Are you making these numbers up?

Alan Diep

Penny-pinching tip of the day, Alan: Try www.shopping.com (where we get most of our pricing).

CAPTION THIS!

Send your caption to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the phrase "Tastes like gibs" in the subject line for a chance to win *Quake 4* and this quick dinner solution.



MAIL BYTES

Tip: Shoot at players named "player" for easy points.
—Cromanion

EB Games doesn't care about PC gamers. Buy my used PC games, bitches!
—MammaJamma

Visit our *Counter-Strike* server (MenOnAMission) for obscenity-free fragging.
—ThreeDayRespawn

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ISSUE 258

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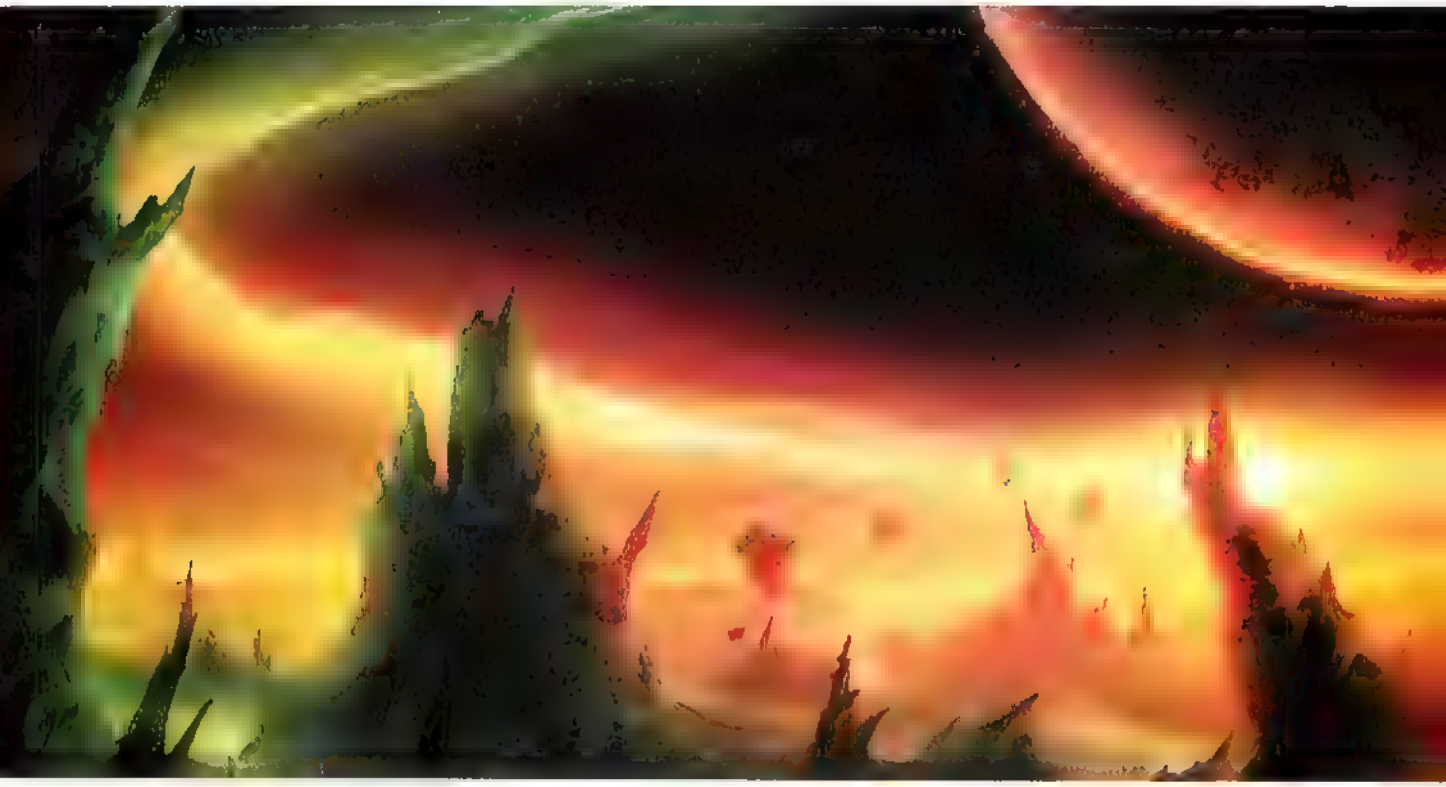
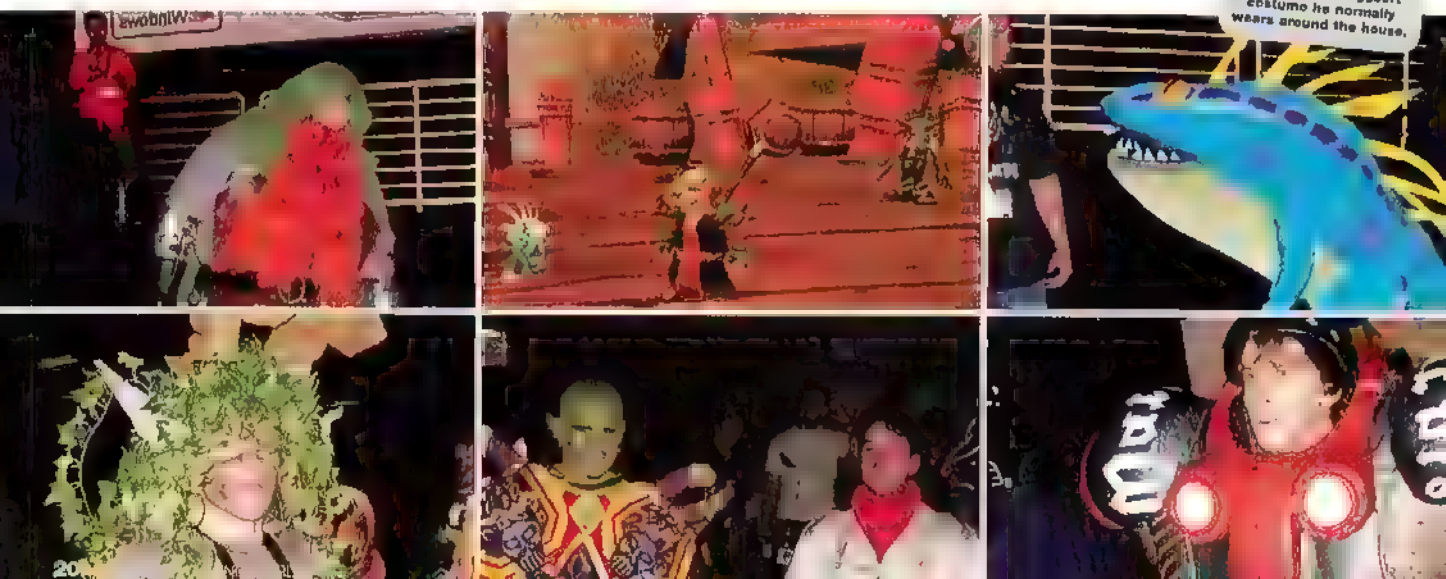


BLIZZARD TAKES ANAHEIM

WOW expansion "announced" at first-ever fan convention

COSPLAYAS

There's nothing wrong with grown adults getting trussed up as their favorite Blizzard characters. Jeff just felt bad for forgetting the Eggbert costume he normally wears around the house.



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GEEK ROADSHOW

BY THE TIME THAT BLIZZCON—Blizzard Entertainment's first fan convention—finally got underway on October 28, the company's biggest announcement was already old news, thanks in part to one blabbermouth magazine editor (ahem) who inadvertently let some of the news slip out on his blog. Yes, *World of WarCraft: The Burning Crusade*, the official expansion to Blizzard's megahit, was no real surprise by day one of the show. That didn't stop 7,800 faithful fans, who paid $120 a pop to attend, from screaming in excitement as the details were officially confirmed. (The biggest cheer went up for raising the level cap to 70.)

Also not a surprise is what the company did not announce: anything new regarding the *Diablo* or *StarCraft* franchises. Sorry, kids, Blizzard focuses on one game at a time—for now it's still *WOW*.

For those willing to wait in line a couple hours, Blizzard set up a giant network of PCs where you could sit down for 15 minutes with the expansion-in-progress and play as a newbie blood elf. Long lines were the order of the day at the sold-out event, as the Anaheim Convention Center was snaked with crowds of people waiting for their chance to play in a *WOW: Battlegrounds* tournament, check out *StarCraft: Ghost* on the Xbox, and, yes, buy Blizzard products. ("LineCon" was one anonymous Blizzard employee's joking description of the event.)

The big lure for some fans were the freebies. All attending *WOW* players got a free pet baby murloc—the only time such a perk would ever be made available. As expected, the cards were up on eBay within hours, going for hundreds of dollars, while enraged nonattendees spammed Internet message boards with complaints.

The most fun for many of the fans and Blizzard folks was at the scheduled panels, where the game designers gathered to discuss in detail various aspects of the *WOW* universe, such as lore/quest design. While the Blizzard designers held their own onstage, the fans themselves stole the show during the Q&A sessions by asking the designers impossibly dorky, often righteous, and sometimes angry questions.

Assorted *WOW* geeks stepped up to complain about what was wrong, unfair, or unjust about their particular character or class. For the most part, it was fun, with everyone taking the ribbing in good humor and loud roars of approval or boos accompanying every comment.

But the highlight by far was the guy who stepped up to the mike in a full murloc outfit—holding a stuffed baby murloc in one hand and a sign with the "no" symbol over the words "murloc slavery" in the other—who launched into a hilarious tirade about being tired of having "his people" exploited and abused by Blizzard. "You call it a quest," he yelled, "I CALL IT GENOCIDE!" Waving the stuffed baby murloc in the air, he screamed, "This is my son you are killing!"

This, friends, is exactly why gamers will never fit in with the rest of the world. **Jeff Green**

No justice, no peace for this mouthy reptile.

INTERVIEW WITH THE MURLOC

TRISTAN POPE, A *WOW* FAN AND filmmaker, nearly stole the show at BlizzCon—he used the convention as a forum for protesting against "murloc slavery." We caught up with him after the show to see how his campaign was going.

CGW: Why murlocs? What's so special about them? Don't quillboars need saving, too? And what about the crocolisks?
Tristan Pope: Why murlocs? I believe that is apparent as evidenced by Blizzard's new campaign at BlizzCon. Instead of making them a part of the world, perhaps as a playable race, they hand out the children of slain murlocs in so-called adoptions—aka slavery! Murlocs have been the brunt of every joke and at the bottom of every food chain since the world of Azeroth came to be. Why? Sure, quillboars, crocolisks, succubi, and most undead all need saving. But we can only take one step at a time. What we are trying to do here is take a step in the right direction and have all races unite and stand up for their rights against this monarchy called Blizzard.

CGW: Baby murlocs are now going for about $200 on eBay. How does this make you feel?
TP: It makes me wish I bought a few of 'em. I mean...to save them from the horrid act of slavery auctions! We are regressing a couple hundred years here. Just watch—a few years from now, Blizzard will be compensating the families with the same money they made selling them, although the money will come from the less fortunate!

CGW: Have you ever killed a murloc in *WOW*?
TP: Did OJ's glove fit? But as a representative of the murlocs, sometimes it is necessary to kill murlocs that are trying to terrorize the masses. There will always be rotten eggs. Unfortunately, we have to fend for ourselves because Blizzard won't help us. I believe they hope for us to wipe ourselves out. We have even heard of murlocs being planted into our society by Blizzard with that intent. But we are a strong race and will not give in to the pressure.

In the real world, Tristan Pope is a filmmaker working in the burgeoning machinima movement. You can see samples of his work, including some WOW movies, at www.craftingworlds.com.

▲ This murloc needs a home. Will she adopt?

▲ Murlocs: mad as hell and not gonna take it.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: SPECIAL EDITION

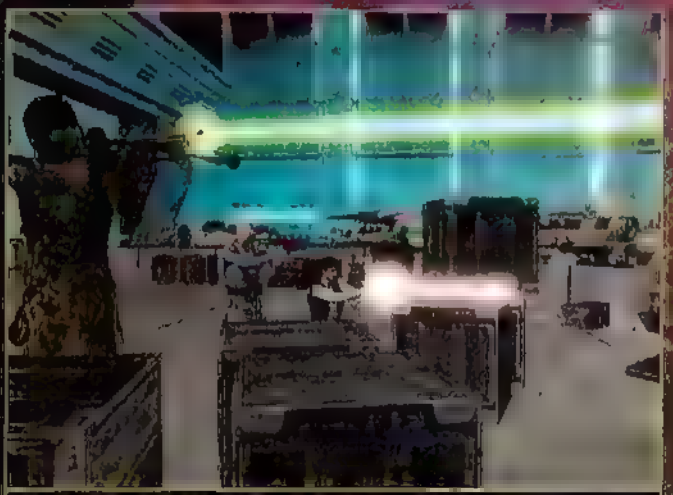
Many Bothans died to bring us this preview

PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: SOE GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Available Now

SECOND THOUGHTS

REVISION IS NOTHING NEW TO *Star Wars* fans—at this point, it's pretty much expected. Legions of fans cried foul over the numerous alterations to the classic *Star Wars* films, and now they get to deal with a different kind of change in the form of Sony Online Entertainment's recent *Star Wars Galaxies* revamp. You already know our take: *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided* claimed *CGW*'s Coaster of the Year award for 2003...and while the Force had certainly gotten stronger with *SWG* over the past two-and-a-half years (thanks in large part to the *Jump to Lightspeed* space expansion), the underlying game mechanics still stank like Wookiee breath. But this past November's sweeping changes fix all that—and while the dark side still clouds our true feelings on the revamp (check out our next issue for an unprecedented *CGW* rereview), we have five reasons for you to give this much-maligned MMORPG a second shot. / Ryan Scott

THE FORCE HAD GOTTEN STRONGER WITH *SWG* OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, BUT THE UNDERLYING GAME MECHANICS STILL STANK LIKE WOOKIEE BREATH.



WHO'S GONNA FLY IT, KID? YOU?

As *CGW* senior editor Darren Gladstone puts it, "In *SWG*, you aren't Luke Skywalker...you're the guy who says, 'Your tauntaun will freeze before you reach the first marker.'" In short: *SWG* really didn't make you matter. Not so anymore—the opening tutorial (now narrated by C-3PO) throws you into the thick of things immediately, as Han and Chewie rescue you from an Imperial prison ship and guide you through the initial batch of objective-based missions. Boba Fett, Darth Vader, and other *Star Wars* mainstays show up early on, making the universe that much more in tune with the *Star Wars* mythos and your role that much more significant.

LOT IN LIFE

Having 30-odd professions to choose from can be pretty daunting—so now everything's boiled down to nine iconic professions: Jedi, bounty hunter, smuggler, officer, commando, spy, trader, medic, and entertainer. Don't see your character's calling listed? No problem—every skill is folded into at least one of these new job descriptions...almost. Some of the omissions already have a handful of creature handlers and bioengineers ready for rebellion, and SOE has even offered a refund to unhappy players who can't accept change. Everyone else gets 10 free re-spec tokens to sample new professions and find the one that suits them—which sounds more than fair to us.

THE FORCE WILL BE WITH YOU

If you happen to be one of the proud few who actually completed the painstaking Jedi quests, don't panic. While the revamp opens the Jedi profession to everyone from the start, SOE promises some special bonuses to veteran Force users. You not only get a cool robe and a unique—and more powerful—lightsaber, but also enjoy the ability to take on the transparent blue "dead Jedi master" form that Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Anakin are so fond of in the movies. Plus, you get to laugh at the new wave of rookie Jedi players—because back in your day, you had to earn the Jedi title, dammit.

OPEN THE BLAST DOORS

When you think *Star Wars*, you probably imagine fast-paced space battles, frantic blaster shoot-outs, and balletic lightsaber duels. *SWG* didn't quite convey any of this excitement, opting instead for drawn-out, *EverQuest*-style warfare. And while the last combat upgrade (met with vehement resistance by a large number of players) tried to address the situation, the revamp brings the action more directly in line with what *Star Wars* fights should look like. Expect quick and dirty battles, with a heap of FPS-inspired mechanics. You now aim at targets with an onscreen reticule, popping off shots as quickly as your overworked left-mouse-button finger can click.

HEAR ME BABY, HOLD TOGETHER

Call us crazy, but *SWG*'s interface made for a solid case of TMI. The patch addresses a lot of lingering issues with the HUD, with the camera being the most obvious overhaul. It now utilizes a handy over-the-shoulder, mouselook-powered perspective, allowing for much more fluid movement and easier interaction with the people and places of the *Star Wars* universe. A streamlined HUD punctuates the camera upgrade, as everything from the quest journal to the overhead map now shows the bare essentials—and none of the clutter that made the game so confusing to the uninitiated.

SWG FOR DUMMIES

The new *Star Wars Galaxies* Starter Kit includes the base game and the *Jump to Lightspeed* expansion—which all players received for free as part of November's content rollout.

IRON GRIP: THE OPPRESSION

Killer Half-Life 2 [illegible]

BASE GAME **Half-life 2** DEVELOPER **Isotx** GENRE **RTS/FPS** RELEASE DATE **January 2006**

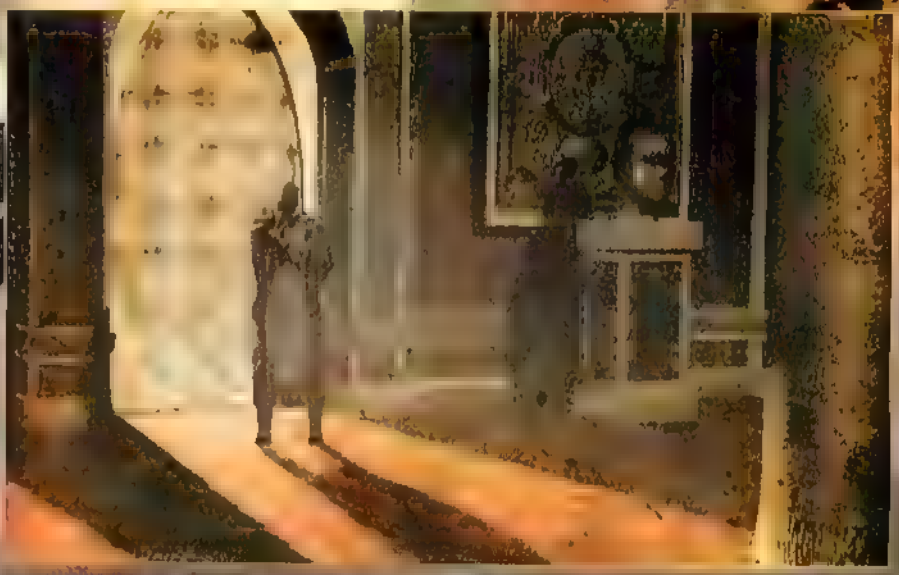
HOT MOD

"THEY'VE TAKEN ANOTHER ONE," HE thinks. The Rahmos general zooms up five stories to scan his [illegible] smoking node, a squat black turrets [illegible] by snowdrifts and smoldering drack. He swoops down to organize his restless troops into formations and barks an order to his major—"Right flank, placer, double back two blocks over." Surprise gunfire smacks the corner structure, and the general springs into action, going to ground. He crouches at the head of his platoon, MG in hand, ready to defend his zone's node from the tattered band of Resistance fighters—clutching flaming Molotovs in [illegible] wrapped [illegible] arrowing toward them.

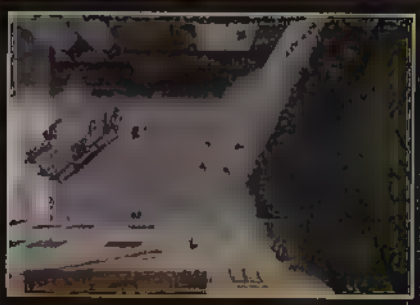
1984 meets *Rambo*? Not [illegible] *Iron Grip: The Oppression*, an upcoming *Half-Life 2* mod conceived by a Dutch art student and funded with money he won in an art show. "What inspired me was mostly World Wars I and II, especially the Eastern European side of those conflicts," confides Vincent van Geel, one of the founding members of Isotx and lead project manager of *Iron Grip*. "I'm also a big fan of Greek tragedy, which you can see in the story—with *Iron Grip*, I wanted to re-create this atmosphere of a beautiful world that's been wrecked."

And wrecked it is, packed with blighted industrial architecture aplenty, but *Iron Grip* is hardly just another run-and-gun through Dystopiaville. In fact, you might say Van Geel's mod has something of a split personality. It pits the top-down multiunit management of a real-time strategy game against the frenetic visceral maneuvering of a first-person shooter. Managers, prep your cul men, because it's going to get bloody—we're talking genre on genre...RTS versus FPS.

/ Matt Peckham



HOW IT WORKS



RTS

"You have two teams," Van Geel explains, "Rahmos and Resistance. The Rahmos team consists of one person who plays the game as an RTS and starts at HQ, controlling the map with all its nodes. The Resistance has to destroy each node in a certain sequence in order to make the HQ vulnerable. Once that's destroyed, the Resistance wins, but they have to accomplish this within a certain time limit, before the Rahmos airships arrive."

FPS

And that's just for starters. "The Rahmos general can spawn major and sergeant units, which can then be controlled by other players. If these guys want, they can actually play their units in FPS mode while the computer A.I. takes care of everything else." And the Resistance? "They always play from the first-person perspective, and they fight outnumbered and have to hide a lot, so we've created 20 diverse character types, each with its own set of 'kitchen' weaponry, like bats, homemade bombs, Molotovs, trip mines, and stuff." Genres, in your corners, please. Ready, set, FIGHT!

DICTATE POLICY THAT WILL HAVE THE ENTIRE U.S. SEEING RED.

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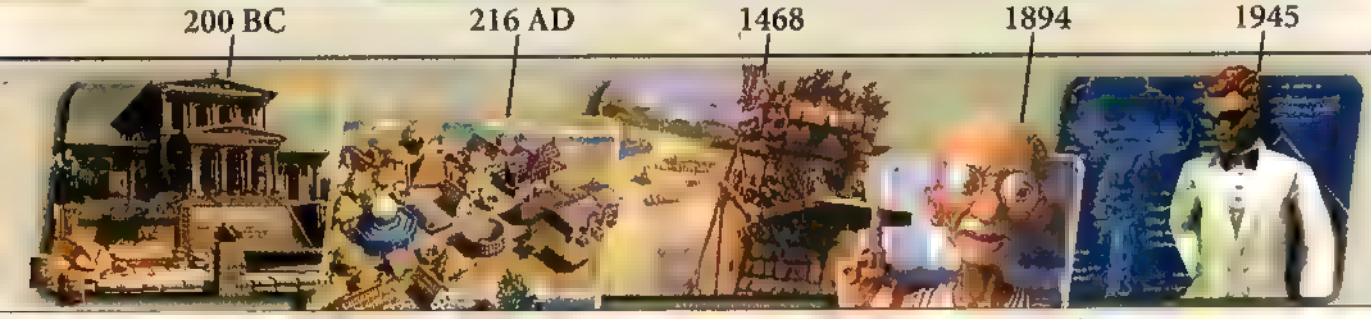

9.4 out of 10
"The only reason to stop playing Civilization IV is to tell other people just how good the game is."
–IGN

IGN.COM EDITORS' CHOICE award

9.4 out of 10
"If you have even a passing interest in strategy games, world history, or getting less sleep at night, you owe it to yourself to give Civilization IV a try."
– GameSpot

5 out of 5 stars
★★★★★
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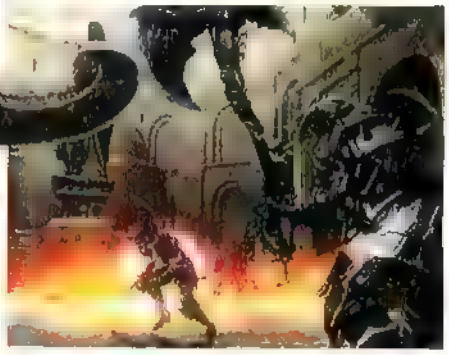
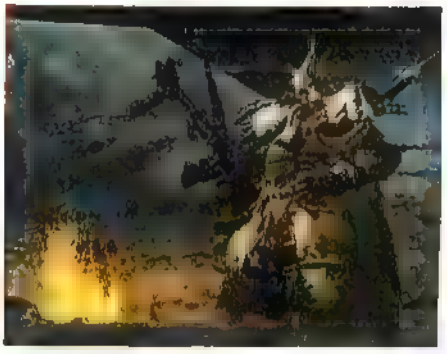
Medieval meets the Far East in *SUN*'s aesthetics.





SUN

Witness the rise of Webzen's next MMO

DEVELOPER: **Webzen** RELEASE DATE: **Sometime in 2006**

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

IT WOULD BE UNTRUE TO SAY THAT *Soul of the Ultimate Nation* (*SUN*), the latest online opus from Korean developer Webzen (whose MMOFPS *Huxley* graced our cover two issues back), breaks all MMORPG conventions. The game combines single-player RPG gameplay with group hack-n-slash, its economy is based on collectible items, and its narrative finds you and your guild joining a band of rebels to fight the evil immortal Emperor, who's hatched a nefarious plot to extract all ether, the essence of nature, from the land and convert it into dark energy. Not exactly groundbreaking stuff here. But during our chat with Aaron Rigby, senior producer of Webzen America, five facts did emerge that seem to set *SUN* apart.

1. QUICK-MOVING ACTION

Rigby says players should "expect console-style gameplay in a PC-based MMORPG. We wanted to avoid the slower pace of battling in traditional MMORPGs and move toward the action of games like *Fable*." The idea is to introduce action-RPG-style play to the otherwise slower pace of a quest-based game in order to get players into the most exciting aspects of the game without first forcing them into a long, battle-poor learning curve. "Even puzzles are often solved with a good, swift smash to the door," Rigby enthuses. Will this "console-style" play extend to the use of a gamepad? Rigby says that's to be determined—which, from where we're standing, means it's entirely possibly.

2. CUSTOMIZABLE BATTLES

High-level questing in an MMORPG like, say, *World of WarCraft* usually means entering specific instanced dungeons with a relatively set number of players and fighting specific monsters that, no matter how many times you enter that dungeon, will always be found in pretty much the same place and be called the same names, likely dropping the same loot each time. In *SUN*, players can actually create their own battle zones and set the parameters of these zones.

"As players are questing through the main story line, they're assigned mission maps that lead to either submaps or new mission maps," Rigby explains. "The submaps are hunting maps, which are opened from mission maps that have been previously cleared. These are customizable by the player, who can select the number of players, the strength of the monsters, the maxi-

> IN *SUN*, PLAYERS CAN ACTUALLY CREATE THEIR OWN BATTLE ZONES AND SET THE PARAMETERS OF THESE ZONES.

▲ The Valkyrie handles multiple weapons—and apparently makes squats an integral part of her workout regimen.

▲ We're thrilled to announce that the Ice Capades will be back in town for the holiday season.

▲ An ABBA reunion! How exciting!

mum player level, and so on. By choosing different types of maps, number of players, degrees of difficulty, monsters, players, and even reward types, players customize their gameplay. In this way, *Soul of the Ultimate Nation* features great gameplay experiences set by the players themselves. By comparison, *WOW* restricts preset maps to certain players who are qualifying under certain conditions." A third type of map, event maps, will support recurring activities like sieges. Expect a PVP system to arrive as part of a major update scheduled for after the game's launch.

3. LARGE-SCALE BATTLES

A *SUN* combat map can contain up to 40 characters battling it out at once on various fields. The outcome of a battle in one field will affect the combat in adjacent fields, making battles feel almost epic in scale.

4. UNIQUE AESTHETIC

"*SUN*'s backstory and gameplay designs marry Asian elements with a medieval fantasy feeling," says Rigby. "The development team wanted to blend the two themes evenly, without emphasizing either style too much."

You can see the result of their handiwork in *SUN*'s five character classes, most of which are pictured on these pages and, according to Rigby, "all of which are pretty balanced and essential to a questing party's success in the game." There's the berserker, "who serves as the 'door crasher' of your party." There's the Shadow, "a magic caster from the Demon Clan who casts powerful dark spells." The Valkyrie, "a fighter who can handle numerous weapons with fluid movement, is a range attack fighter who supports her party from the rear and also can use summoning skills as a supporting caster." The elementalist, meanwhile, "casts some seriously powerful assault spells and offers her party supporting spells." And...

5. POLYMORPHING

...the dragon knight, seen directly to the right, is "a fighter character who can deliver impressive damage with his quickness and dazzling fighting skills—and depending on how a player progresses through the game, he can polymorph himself into dragon." Why kill dragons when you can be one instead?

Kristen Salvatore

SO YOU WANNA...

RUN A DEDICATED GAME SERVER

CGW's periodic guide to getting your game on

HOW-TO

KICKED FOR TEAMKILLING, stranded in the same map match after match, accused of cheating—sometimes playing on public servers sucks. If you're serious about online shooting, it's only a matter of time before the thought crosses your mind: I should be the admin doing the banning. Trouble is, how to start a server is a mystery to most folks. Have no fear; we're here to help.

First up: a lesson in lingo. A "server" is simply the PC running the master game that the rest of us connect to. Connected gamers are called clients. Now, you've probably heard of a dedicated server. All that means is that no one is actually playing on the box running the master game. (It is possible to play on the same machine you use as a server, in which case it's called a listen server, but most modern games are simply too processor intensive for that.)

Then there's bandwidth. Broadband might afford you, and you alone, a lightning-fast connection, but hosting a handful of gamers brings it to its knees lickety-split. A server has to send updates out to everyone, so it needs a fat pipe on the upload side—precisely the point where most residential services stretch thin.

Long story short, the quickest and easiest way to get your own server, with you in charge, is to lease one. For a fee, companies specializing in running game servers will set up your game and run it on a high-end box in a datacenter sitting on the Internet's backbone. How much that sets you back depends on how many heads you want to support. The more people playing, the more server resources and bandwidth you need. It's as simple as that. To get you going, we look at three of the most widely used game server solutions out there. Garnett Lee

SERVER SOLUTIONS

TRINITY GAMING (www.trinitygames.com)
With experience that stretches back to the original *Tribes* days, Trinity Gaming knows firsthand what it takes to provide high-performance gaming servers on the Net. Datacenters, equally spread across the country in San Jose, Dallas, and New York (as well as Amsterdam for our European friends), house beefy twin Intel Xeon servers running either a custom-tuned Linux or Windows system. And each of them is connected to multiple backbone providers at up to OC-192 speeds (that's 10 gigabits per second, folks!).

Thanks to that power, Trinity's accounts are not limited by bandwidth. Trinity hosts a wide range of games, from contemporary (*Battlefield 2* and *UT2004*) to classic (*Quake II* and *Red Faction*). As for control, Trinity gives users full FTP access to servers, which means that you can update with more or less any mod or map you'd like. For a 24-player ranked public *Counter-Strike: Source* server expect to pay around $72 per month.

CLAN SERVERS (www.clanservers.com)
Clan Servers' slogan is simple enough: "Frag, not lag." Using Dell Poweredge Dual Xeon game servers to back up that claim, the provider has stations in six locations spread across the country: Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. A handy real-time map on Clan Servers' website gives users ping estimates for each of its six areas. Plus you can switch your server's site up to four times per month at no additional charge.

Full FTP access is part of the package, but Clan Servers' tech support team will install most popular mods for you, free of charge. A 24-player *Counter-Strike: Source* server runs $48 per month.

GAMEDAEMONS (www.gamedaemons.net)
GameDaemons' high-end hardware crushes the competitions', but an added edge is the company's Game Development Extensions (GDX) technology, which manages server load to maximize stability. GDX also allows GameDaemons to dynamically apply patches the instant that they're released. Plus, the company's web-based kPanel offers an impressive degree of control over your server's settings. In addition to 120 tabs to do things like stop and restart the server, the kPanel also allows you to change mods or even the hosted game itself from a few easy-to-use pull-down menus. That unparalleled power and ease of use come at a cost, though: A 24-player *Counter-Strike: Source* server will set you and your clan back $202.50 a month.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY JANUARY 2006

THE GOOD

Pandemic Studios, the developer behind *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Star Wars Battlefront II*, is teaming up with a new developer called BioWare (perhaps you've heard of it, seeing as it counts *Shattered Steel* and *MDK2* among its achievements? While Silicon Valley venture capital company Elevation Partners pitched the $300 million deal [illegible]

THE BAD

I, SPY

[illegible]

THE UGLY

[illegible]

IN A WORLD OF TREACHERY AND DECEIT
EVERYONE HAS GOLD IN COMMON.
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CITY OF GUILDS
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ALL THAT THE

Battlefield 2 becom[illegible] MMO

INSIDE SCOOP

THE PICTURE-PERFECT *BATTLEFIELD* match is on Michael Lewis' mind. Define it by what doesn't go down as much as by what does: no pranksters flooring Humvees into friendly tanks, hoping to send it all up in smoke and hardy-har-hars; no teens combining curse words like Tourette's sufferers; basically, no bulls***. Clans—better bets for camaraderie and cooperation than come-one-come-all public servers—can't address all of the concerns on Lewis' checklist. What's on his mind? More or less what the 19-year-old history major has been making along with fellow *Battlefield* fiends Luis Alvarez, Werner Soeteman, and Allan Hansen: BF2 Combat's Tour of Duty, a virtual war featuring hierarchically structured divisions and multiple 10-hour-long battles every week.

"*Battlefield 2* is spectacular," says Lewis. "It's balanced, it's beautiful, it's one of the greatest games I've had the privilege of playing, but, as I see it, it's also a lot like paint: If you don't have an artist to transform it into a work of art, it sits on the shelf." Or, maybe more aptly, the paint runs and smears in random patches of wild and woolly pigment. However you spin the simile, Lewis says, "Tour of Duty lets people play the game the way it was meant to be played. People in our community have the power to improve their own experiences, and we provide tools for them to do so." Interestingly, the Tour is an independent project separate from *BF2* publisher EA, although it's actually testing a pay-to-play direction that the series might take somewhere down the line.

If, when you opt in to the program at www.bf2combat.net, it feels like you've legitimately enlisted, that's the idea. (Lewis estimates that "somewhere around 40 percent of our members have military experience of some sort.") Once you've agreed to fight with American, Chinese, or Middle Eastern forces and decided on a division, your company commanding officer puts you in a platoon. Then—like boots in their bar-

WE ASK, THEY TELL

Via e-mail, forums, and voice over IP, *CGW* asked BF2 Combat's enlisted men to sound off on their time in the Tour. Guess what? Unless some secret operating procedure persuaded 'em all to blow sunshine up our asses, they're all gung ho.

3|F|18|CPL.EHKART

"No more wandering in and out of servers to meet new people and then never see them again; no more living for an average of six seconds before being shelled; no more throwing my keyboard across the room; no more stolen armor. In fact, now that I'm in an armored company, teammates offer me tanks and APCs."

[BF2C]UNIGEE

"It's fantastic to see folks from almost every continent come together beneath one banner. One of my favorite highlights is seeing how new members describe their first battles in forum posts. I've also enjoyed all the ideas—from the Army Choir, where members record battle songs, to the good old *Globe Weekly* newspaper reports."

...CAN BE

...women meet and greet in forums and dedicated Teamspeak servers, fostering the esprit de corps that makes the forthcoming clashes feel all the more meaningful. But COs must first make warriors before sending them off to war.

IN THE ARMY NOW

So *Battlefield* sounds fun to you, but its near-infinite arsenal and never-ending acreage seem too daunting to deal with? Try Tour of Duty's basic training. EA product manager Darren Montgomery sees it as a sort of interactive how-to: "In normal settings, most newcomers are too busy trying to not get fragged to pick up the skill...

...pts open to them. They choose a class and stick with it. Training for a Tour of Duty provides a safe way to try and perfect things. For example, they taught me effective ways to use anti-tank weaponry, and how to HALO [high altitude, low opening] jump—[I practiced doing it] over and over again until I could pop the chute on command and touch down on a specific spot."

Vets, on the other hand, are invited to qualification courses conducted on custom-built maps. By qualifying for particular duties—say, ...service—you're ensuring that your division's B... Hawks and Abrams and Bradleys aren't wasted, and that whole platoons won't bunch up on the tarmac waiting to fly one F-35 while the enemy overwhelms your forward positions unopposed. In addition, truly capable troopers can aspire to Army Ranger School, a course designed and maintained by real Army Rangers (see sidebar on following page).

"Our ranking system is meritocratic," says Lewis. "We promote members based on their ▶

> "CAPABLE TROOPERS CAN ASPIRE TO ARMY RANGER SCHOOL."

24P|2|1LT.MACKENZIE

"Before the Tour, I was losing interest in *BF2*. With its squad-and-commander system, the game has the potential for coordinated, tactical warfare, but that's generally wasted on public players. Plus, people behave worse than [players] in *Counter-Strike*, what with the blatant friendly fire, point farming, and vehicle hoarding. This community showed me [otherwise]."

38P|45|1LT.IMPY5

"You get to the point where you'd rather sacrifice yourself for your team than do things to pad your own score. And you're recognized for it."

3IF|1TA|1LT.RABBI

"The neatest thing is getting to know the people you work with week after week. That, and being able to drop into the Teamspeak server at any time of day and still find someone to hang out with."

ON THE DISC! Get the Tour of Duty promo movie

The Globe Weekly

MIDEAST, CHINA DECLARE WAR!

Viewpoints: Key Military Officials Speak Their Mind

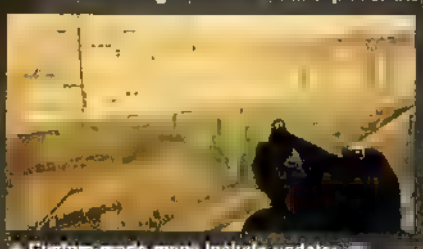
United Nations To Monitor War

▲ The Tour's Globe Weekly newspaper contributes to the campaign's narrative.

▲ Say it's so! The Tour's infantry works in conjunction with its tank crews.

abilities to command and communicate rather than on insignificant factors such as kill/death ratio and the time they've spent sitting in helicopters capturing flags. Oftentimes, battles come down to who controls which points and when, and our commanders designate elite units to defend main bases. So, rather than looking at a flag as a source of free points, our members learn that holding on to one can turn the tide of battle. And it leads to scenarios that you don't often see in public play. When you and your three-man squad successfully defend a fire base against two tanks, and an assault helo, you'll know you're in BF2 Combat."

It's in its series of showdowns that the pay-to-play Tour of Duty (a three-month stint sets you back $9.95, and $34.95 signs you up for one year) becomes something more than a meticulously managed clan. Divisions do battle twice a week on two different maps: One is set in stone and tied into the Tour's story line, whereas winners of the previous week's scrimmages select the second, secret map. "At the end of each battle, we tabulate statistics," Lewis explains, "and—aside from the strategic plus of picking the secret map—whichever side wins more rounds also takes a new territory. We then update the world map on our site, and the winning side is able to select the next theater it wants to attack. For instance, the 24P People's Liberation Army is currently driving the U.S. forces out of China, so if they win this Tour, they can start attacking U.S. interests in Japan or the South Pacific in the next Tour."


▲ Custom-made maps include updates of *BF1942* mod *Desert Combat* favorites.

The Globe Weekly, an official newspaper penned by twenty-something philosophy student and TOD member Wintergreen, chronicles the Tour's progress from a neutral perspective, creating a cohesive narrative and adding to the sense that what you do today affects what you'll do tomorrow. "It's all part of the meta-game feeling, your little battle meaning more in a big war," says EA's Montgomery. "The paper acts as both information and snarky propaganda—they don't take it too seriously, in line with *Battlefield*'s sense of humor."

Tongue-in-cheek stuff aside, the 1,600-member-strong Tour is serious business. Where Montgomery concedes "this type of meta-game is something [*BF2* developer] DICE has considered in the past and will continue to consider," Lewis insists that his service is the future of first-person shooting: "Overseeing a pay-to-play environment is as difficult as it is lucrative. We're providing developers with the option of integrating that functionality into their existing games while freeing them to focus on producing, marketing, and improving their titles. By EA's own admissions in their 2004 and 2005 reports, they've had 'limited success in finding ways of generating revenues and profits from online games.' Of their pay-to-play online titles, only *Ultima Online* was a significant success. On the other hand, stuff like *Earth and Beyond* failed miserably, losing millions of dollars. So, considering the combination of massive development and maintenance costs and uncertain revenue stream, working with [us] instead of rushing into developing their own system is a no-brainer." *BF2* lead designer Lars Gustavsson is interested in the idea, too: "We do find this interesting and have been talking about it since when we started making *BF1942*. It extends gameplay from a couple of hours here and there and actually puts it into a bigger picture. Plus, we're always looking for talented people, so who knows..." /Shawn Elliott

▲ *BF2 Combat*'s world map tracks the Tour's week-to-week progress.

HOOAH!

Tour of Duty's Army Ranger School is so tough, not a single candidate has actually passed the course. Headmaster Rock says his philosophy is simple: "In the field of battle you don't have time to think, you just react. Adapt as fast as possible, stay flexible with your tactics—that's how you win, and that's what I'm trying to teach these guys." The real-life ex-Ranger's curriculum often involves creating strategy from operations orders. "For example," Rock says, "a squad leader knows that the enemy strength is four tanks, his target is three clicks away, and that he has Black Hawk support. It's up to him to relegate his resources and act accordingly. Just like in real life, you get a bunch of guys with a bunch of egos, but they all need to work together—if just one guy messes up, then they're all out of the course." Sir, yes, sir!

One Wants to Free His People...

I returned home expecting peace. Instead I found my kingdom ravaged by war and my people enslaved. Now I am a fugitive, hunted by hostile armies and plagued by a curse that is gradually possessing my soul. A darker prince resides in me now, and I must embrace his powers and skill if I want to restore peace to my land, my people, and my soul.

BF2 COMBAT:
THE BATTLEFIELD 2 TOUR OF DUTY™

HOLIDAY GIVEAWAY

Wage the ultimate online war! Planet Combat and *Computer Gaming World* are stuffing five stockings with swank *Battlefield 2* gear. Five lucky winners will receive the following:

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HOW TO ENTER

Go to http://tourofduty.cgwgaming.com and submit this code: J4NKMONK3YS

For full contest legal rules, restrictions, and details, visit http://tourofduty.cgwgaming.com.

ABOUT BF2 COMBAT: THE BATTLEFIELD 2 TOUR OF DUTY

Ten-hut! It's time to wage your online war in a mature, cheater-free environment with BF2 Combat's *Battlefield 2* Tour of Duty. BF2 Combat is not a ladder or a league; it's a virtual war featuring divisions hierarchically structured like the real deal, multiple 10-hour-long battles every week, and a boatload of features you won't find anywhere else. If you're already a member of an existing clan, you can join and play in the same unit. Report for duty at www.bf2combat.net today.

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UBISOFT

HITMAN: BLO

PUBLISHER Eidos/SCi DEVELOPER IO Interactive GENRE Stealth-Action RELEASE DATE April 2006

PREVIEW

AGENT 47 IS MORE THAN JUST A number; he's one of the world's best assassins. Too bad he has such a checkered past. No, we don't mean all the cruel and unusual killings; we're talking about the performance of his previous games. *Hitman: Codename 47* ambitiously lets you attempt assassinations in a relatively open world but is seriously buggy. Its sequel, *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, solves most of these issues, offering one fantastic experience. *Hitman: Contracts*...not so much.

Which brings us to *Hitman: Blood Money*, in which our favorite bald-headed, bar-code-tattooed killer performs hits while dealing with a rival agency. As in the rest of the series, you'll be globe-trotting, as we did in the demo: One minute, we were in Sin City, where 47 had to infiltrate a hotel and leave a suitcase bomb, and the next we were jetting to New Orleans for Mardi Gras.

From what we saw, developer IO Interactive has learned from previous mistakes and is refining the gameplay experience. Close-quarters combat will be vastly improved: You can shove, head-butt, disarm, and even use someone as a human shield. Don't run around half-cocked, though: *Blood Money*'s real attraction is letting you think of more interesting ways to assassinate targets while making your kills look accidents. Your on-the-job performance ties into the game's new notoriety system, which provides incentives for being stealthy. After each mission, newspapers report the incident, and depending on how many people spotted you, increasingly accurate police sketches may make the news—and make your life considerably harder as you work on your next hit.

/ Darren Gladstone

OD MONEY

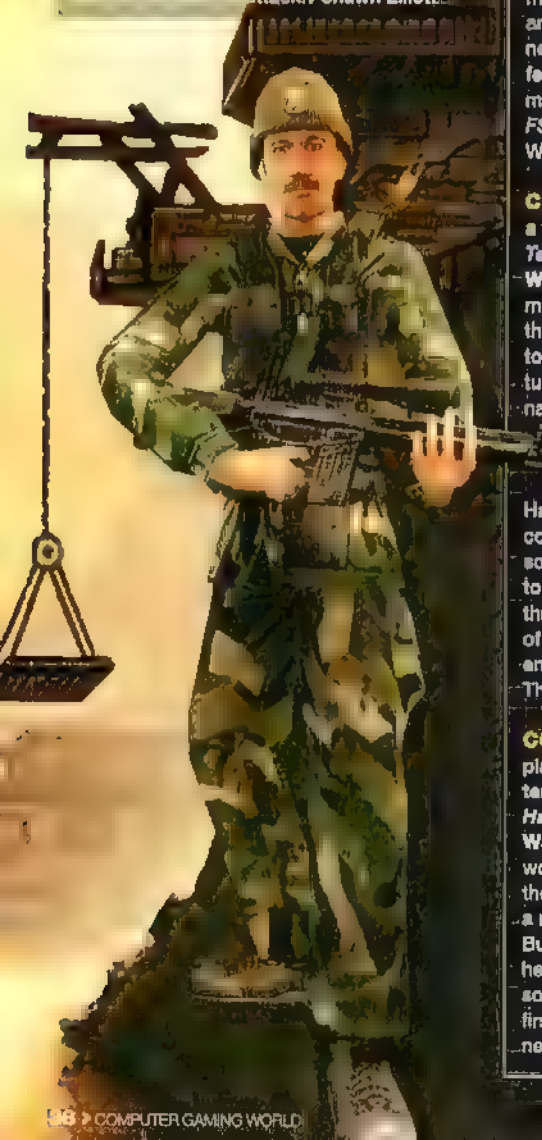
FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

Producer Will Stahl sounds off

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios GENRE: Tactical Action RELEASE DATE: Winter 2008

FIRST LOOK

FOR ALL THE SHOOTING, ARMY-authentic infantry-tactics sim *Full Spectrum Warrior* isn't a shooter. Your finger never touches the trigger, and yet you set up cover fire with one squad while bounding into flanking position with a second; instead of shoving around game pieces from a general's-eye view, you're in the middle of it with your men. If the catch that slapped checkmate on the thing is simple, snafu: Combat is so quent playthroughs hold sequel *Ten Hammers*, winter, hopes to right grill producer Will attack. / Shawn Elliott



CGW: What did the first *Full Spectrum Warrior* accomplish?
Will Stahl: We proved that people are open to alternative control mechanisms and mechanics if presented in an approachable and highly polished package. And *FSW* was new and original. If you look at the common features among high-profile games in the military genre—or any genre for that matter—*FSW* had a very high probability of failure. We're proud of its success.

CGW: *Full Spectrum Warrior* took place in a fictional geopolitical hot spot. Where does *Ten Hammers* happen?
WS: *Ten Hammers* takes place some six months after the events of the first game. As the country we created, Zekistan, transitions to peace, a northern province sees an opportunity to splinter off and become a separate nation. The ensuing tension culminates in the city of Khardiman, where separatists seize the city and take control of a major bridge. The Tien Hamir, or "Ten Hammers," Bridge is the only bridge that connects the north of the country to the south, making it tactically significant. Wanting to quell the uprising before it spreads throughout the country, a U.N. Coalition force of U.S. and British troops enters the city to enforce the peace and secure the bridge. That's where it starts.

CGW: *Brothers in Arms* paired first-person play with *FSW*'s suppress-and-assault system. Has Gearbox's game influenced *Ten Hammers* in turn?
WS: We always assumed that someone would take *FSW*'s elements and incorporate them into a standard shooter—it seemed like a no-brainer even to us during development. But the franchise is not about being the hero—it's about commanding heroes. We left so much on the table when we finished the first game that we couldn't wait to start the next installment. For instance, we deliberately withheld deeper command elements because we felt learning the basics was overwhelming enough. With *Ten Hammers*, we're opening things up and demonstrating how the interface we've developed can be expanded for a much deeper and much faster experience.

CGW: Some argued that, in creating an educational tool for soldiers, you ended up with a game that was more about doctrine than gameplay....
WS: I would agree with that in some respects, but doctrine is what the Army is all about. We stuck to the basics and strived to give you a window, with real insight, into the reality of commanding modern soldiers in urban combat.

CGW: How does head-to-head work?
WS: Each side has an objective to complete, and each mission's story ties in to the solo campaign. Coalition forces are more organized and have tremendous firepower—they're the sledgehammer, but they're bound by the rules of engagement. Furthermore, they can only sustain a few casualties, and they cannot cause a great deal of collateral damage or civilian death. Insurgents, on the other hand, lack the organization and firepower of Coalition players but have superior numbers and aren't bound by any rules of warfare—they're the hornet's nest. Additionally, insurgents can turn civilians against the Coalition.

CGW: How else is *Ten Hammers* evolving the series?
WS: Gameplay is faster paced. We've updated enemy A.I. to create a much more random and dynamic system, which means that the same mission will play differently each time you load it. We've also added new tools and commands, most notably mechanized unit support. Bradley Fighting Vehicles—completely scripted before—are entirely under your control now.

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Buggin' out: antlions are not your friends.

HALF-LIFE 2:

PUBLISHER Valve Software DEVELOPER Valve Software GENRE Shooter RELEASE DATE February/March 2006

PREVIEW

DON'T CALL *HALF-LIFE 2: Aftermath* (Episode #1 in an ongoing series of what writer/director Marc Laidlaw calls "core canon" sequels) shovelware, even if it's just one-third as long as *HL2* and is going from development to your desktop in a fraction of the time the original game took.

According to Valve rep Doug Lombardi, the forward-thinking developer's goals for the game are threefold:

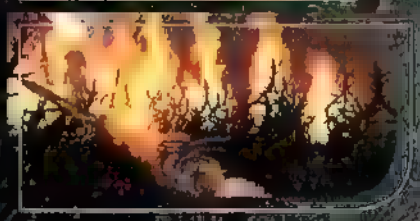
"1) Extend *Half-Life 2*'s story and answer questions about what's happened to everyone and everything since your battle with Dr. Breen.

2) Introduce new artificial intelligence and graphics technology. *HL2* came close to the type of character interaction we wanted to achieve, and *Aftermath* is an opportunity to take that further. Plus, it's letting us leverage high dynamic range lighting [introduced in the recently released Lost Coast level], along with a few new tech features.

3) Establish the notion of a game 'episode.' Where expansion packs are known entities, we're hoping *Aftermath* will help create a new product category that offers high production values in a shorter experience and for a much lower price."

As for additional details—for example, how exactly City 17 has changed since scientist stud Gordon Freeman liberated it from otherworldly oppressors—Valve remains all winks, nods, and "wait and sees." Laidlaw does, however, drop two teasers: "[Good guy] Dr. Kleiner has taken over Dr. Breen's broadcast systems. And as for [heroine] Alyx's new abilities, do the words 'studied with ninjas' mean anything to you?" **/Shawn Elliott**

AFTERMATH
[GOOD GUY] DR. KLEINER HAS TAKEN
DR. BREEN'S BROADCAST SYSTEMS
—WRITER/DIRECTOR MARC LAIDLAW



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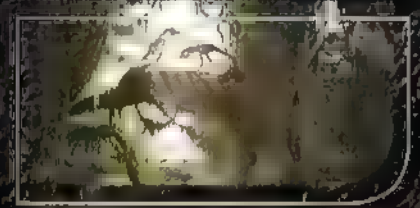


THINK YOU KNOW KING KONG? THINK AGAIN.

BREATHING HEAVILY, YOU CROUCH IN A DENSE THICKET OF JUNGLE VINES. Twenty yards away a hungry V-Rex rages through the trees, hunting for his dinner. You grasp frantically for your gun – only to find it empty. Suddenly, an impossibly huge ape sends the V-Rex sprawling and a titanic struggle erupts. Welcome to Skull Island – and the unforgettable world of Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie.

ADVERTISEMENT

King Kong first stormed the silver screen in 1933, astonishing audiences with a powerful story and groundbreaking special effects. Peter Jackson's current re-imagining promises to do no less, bringing the perilous world of Skull Island to life as only Jackson can. Jackson – and famed game designer Michel Ancel, that is.

Some of Skull Island's nasdaq predators were created exclusively for the game.

> "[Ancel] makes you so involved in the game as a player that you actually become emotionally attached to the characters that you're playing with."
>
> – Peter Jackson

+ + + + + + + +

PETER JACKSON BEGAN DREAMING UP IDEAS for a King Kong computer game as soon as he started on the movie. An avid gamer, he wanted to create a game that was both deeper and more immersive than the film, and that packed at least as much technical wow. By forming an extraordinarily close partnership with renowned game designer Michel Ancel, Jackson accomplished that and more.

BREATHING LIFE INTO A LEGEND

Jackson and Ancel set out to create a game that looks and feels as convincing as the "real" world captured on film. To achieve this, their development team used every trick in the book – plus a few that aren't.

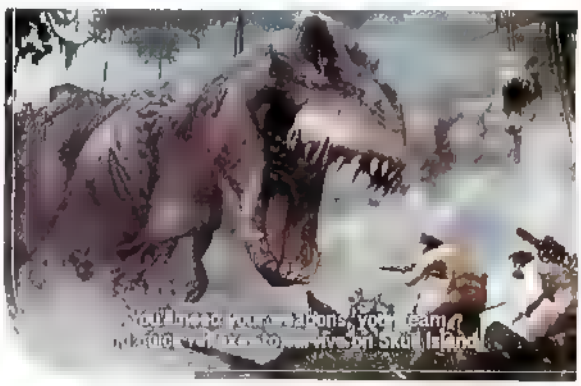
Most remarkable, perhaps, is their use of inverse kinematics, which adds frightening realism to the behavior of Skull Island's predators. This technique varies and synchronizes the animations used for each type of creature, depending on the creature's AI. For example, if you're detected by a V-Rex, you'll see it turn its eyes and head directly toward you, lunging over rocks and smashing through the jungle in a convincing attempt to make you its dinner.

The creatures' animations are triggered by a sophisticated AI system that governs the behavior of Skull Island's many species. Some species attack alone, while others use clever pursuit tactics to attack in groups. This "food chain" effect is especially unnerving when you run the game on a multi-threaded processor like the Intel® Pentium® processor Extreme Edition. Having two processing cores with Hyper-Threading Technology lets you run four threads simultaneously, giving your PC stronger multitasking capability and making the AI that much more lifelike.

Fortunately, your enemies aren't the only intelligent creatures on Skull Island. Your fellow explorers will protect you, suggest solutions to problems and generally react as real humans would.

A MASSIVE STEP FORWARD: INNOVATIONS IN [illegible]

Every technical decision has been made with an eye to immersing the player in the world of the game. As you move through the jungle of Skull Island, blades of grass rustle around your legs. Sunlight patterns shift subtly; creatures stir in the distance. With a strong chipset – especially one supporting Hyper-Threading Technology[1] – the game's seemingly infinite layers of lighting



[illegible] your creations, your team [illegible] to survive on Skull Island.

Where guns fail, brute strength often prevails.

filters, 2D sprites, and meteorological effects don't just make the jungle look incredible. They bring it to life.

Unlike most games, the scripted events run off the in-game engine, so you can look around and move as they unfold. The absence of a heads-up display makes the action feel more immediate. Instead of monitoring a health bar, you know that your character is weakening when your vision blurs and turns red.

The game also offers experiences that don't appear in the movie. Creatures that Jackson couldn't fit into the film fill the jungle. Multiple pathways offer you a different experience every time you play, so that you'll never have to play the same game twice. The difficulty level also scales fluidly according to your performance, growing more challenging as you improve. This multi-threaded design is optimized on a dual-core processor like the Intel® Pentium® processor Extreme Edition, offering an intensely cinematic game experience.

PLAYING WITH POWER: HEROES GREAT AND SMALL

Perhaps most impressive is the range of emotions evoked by the alternating gameplay. By inviting you to play as both Jack Driscoll and Kong, the game delivers a dramatic shift in perspective and power.

As Jack, you are constantly outnumbered and overpowered by predators that are bigger, stronger and faster than you. To heighten the sense of fear and danger, Jack's role is played in first-person. You have to advance through a dense and deadly jungle, never knowing what's behind the next tree. Armed only with the weapons you can carry, you'll never win just by fighting. You'll need other strategies to stay alive, such as tricking predators into battling each other and using the environment to set traps.

Kong's third-person play becomes available at key moments. When the camera pulls back to reveal Kong's mighty perspective, you feel a rush of freedom and power. Delivered from the harried perspective of Jack, you inherit swift movements, powerful battle attacks, and the gratifying ability to smash, throw and scale the objects around you. But playing Kong isn't just a walk in the park. Confronted by multiple enemies with varied attack patterns, you'll have to fight hard to defeat huge V-Rexes and outsmart swarms of smaller predators.

The alternating gameplay between Jack and Kong not only intensifies the emotions inherent in the story, it also presents you with new challenges just when you want them most. Played on a top-notch system based on the Intel Pentium processor Extreme Edition, the stunningly detailed graphics, ultra-realistic game physics and advanced artificial intelligence provide a superior game experience that is nothing short of unforgettable.

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

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UBISOFT

COLUMN

GLADSTONED

Senior editor Darren Gladstone's monthly rant

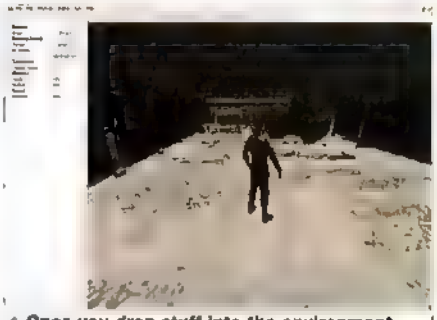
I'm a big jerk. Every month, I bitch and moan about some game's lame design or horrible ideas. Probably makes you say, "If you're so damn smart, why don't you go and make your own game?" Glad you asked.

ENTERACTIVE FIRST CONTACTED me with this pitch: "How would you like to create and play your own FPS games without knowing how to model in 3D or understanding a single line of code?" That's perfect for a dumbass like me! So, of course, I was willing to spend an afternoon tooling around with its new *FPS Creator*.

Don't have false expectations here. Nobody will be constructing the next *Half-Life* with *FPS Creator*. You can try your hand at making a single-player adventure, but you are limited to the packed-in textures. The initial kit comes loaded with sci-fi- and WWII-themed sets and props, because, as everyone knows, it's not a real FPS unless you're killing aliens, Nazis, or alien Nazis. One can only assume the developer—and the community—will eventually release additional asset packs.

My goal for the day was to create the ultimate multiplayer arena map. I wound up with *CGW's Dance of Death*™. Unfortunately, my little project had a rocky start. The original plan was to re-create the *CGW* offices, map the faces of our staff onto models, assign each an attribute

This is your main interface. From here you can do all the basic work, such dropping down props and weapons and creating rooms that have no exits! Yay!



Once you drop stuff into the environment, you can go into the real nitty-gritty details of any object on the map.

(Ryan's the stealth ninja, Jeff is the camper/sniper…you get the idea), and then kick ass. Trouble was, that wasn't going to happen in under five hours.

What I settled on instead was an asinine mishmash of rooms slapped next to each other in a hellish cubist nightmare—high-tech zombie labs next to World War II corridors, a Nazi watchtower, French country houses, elevators, stairs leading nowhere, and an oh-so-tempting arsenal room with no way out.

Once you get over the learning hump, it's actually pretty easy to paint levels up to spec. Based off a simple grid system, the program lets you easily drill down to see all the details (though the camera control while doing this could be a little more forgiving).

Time for an in-map test run as a machine-gun-toting zombie.

FPS Creator has an in-game physics engine, lightmapping, and even a half-decent proprietary graphics engine. You just have to remember to keep your expectations low—*Quake II*–level low, if even that. Other limitations: The arena maps can support only eight players, and many of the bigger weapons of mass destruction (rocket launchers and the like) are disabled in multiplay. Still, it's hard to complain, given that I'm able to make my own game in under five hours for $50 bucks.

After you're done designing comes the cool part: Via the Build Game option, you can create a self-executable file and folder with all the assets. Now anyone can play your map! OK, so I won't be winning any designer awards with this version, but look for a patch after the game's release.

Darren Gladstone

Got a bone to pick with Gladstone? E-mail him at Darren_Gladstone@ziffdavis.com.

CGW'S DANCE OF DEATH

The unofficial review

Good lord! This game wasn't created, it was excreted. Let's not beleaguer the point by trying to make sense of mashing Nazis, zombies, robots, and aliens into the same fragfest. The level design screams—"M.C. Escher meets Charles Manson." Basically, you'd have more fun putting starved ferrets in a feedbag and strapping it to your crotch.

It's still better than *Postal 2*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

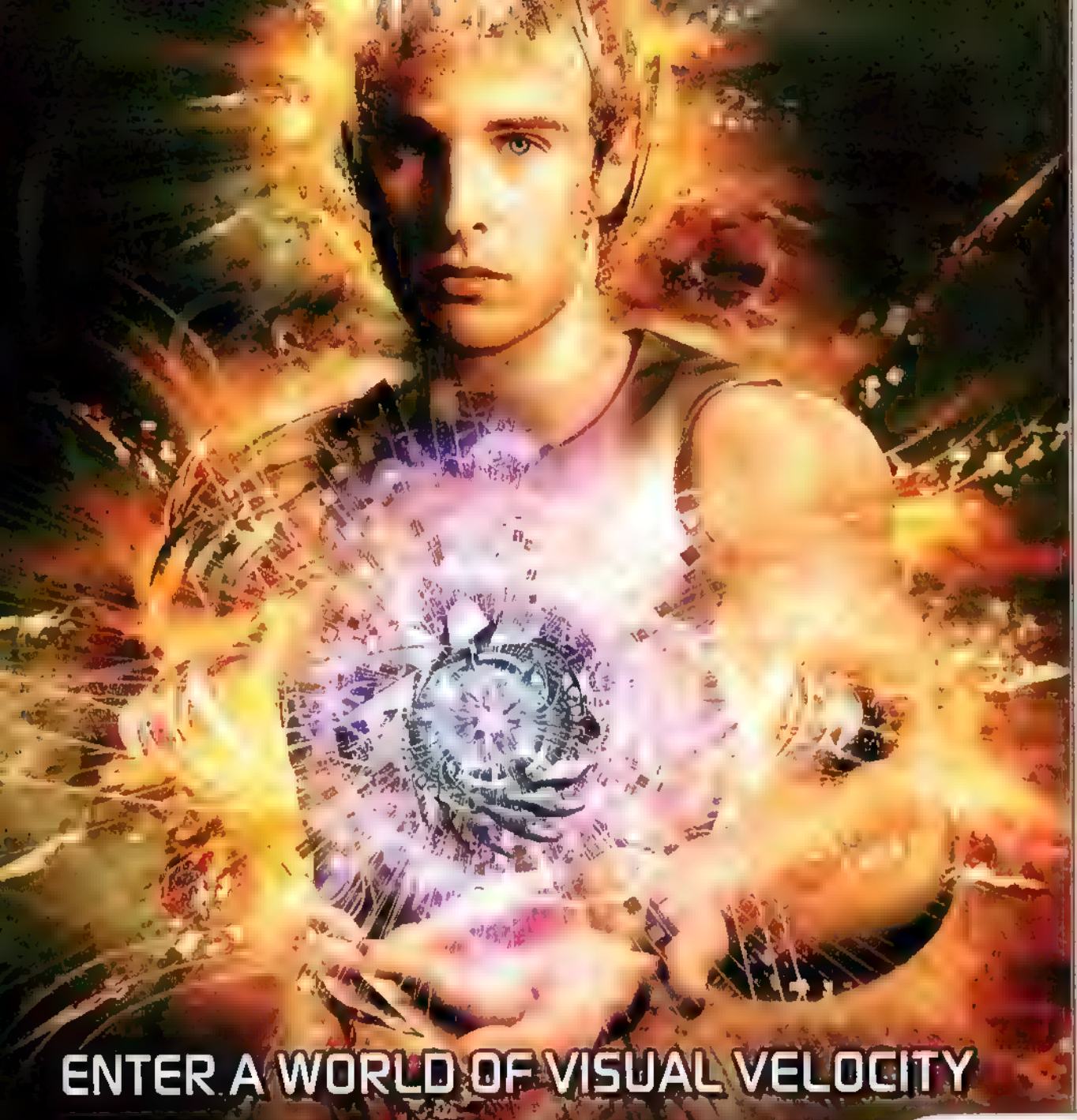
CONSOLE CORNER WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE REST OF THE GAMING WORLD

GUITAR HERO (PS2)

PUBLISHER: RedOctane DEVELOPER: Harmonix

into your inner Angus Young. (The game's [illegible] buddy [illegible] developer.) The game's [illegible] beer-drinking/party game to taste. Besides, you've been practicing [illegible]

—Darren Gladstone



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[illegible] *Total Annihilation*, one of the industry's [illegible] revered real-time strategy [illegible] Taylor, that's an easy one. Start a new company, build up the successful *Dungeon Siege* [illegible] and mix a movie deal with maligned director Uwe Boll, though we still can't sort out that [illegible] Taylor's scratched his action-RPG itch, he's devoting a little more love to his favorite genre in the form of Gas Powered Games' *Supreme Commander*. What sets this [illegible] successor to *Total Annihilation* apart from every other RTS out there? See for yourself. / Ryan Scott

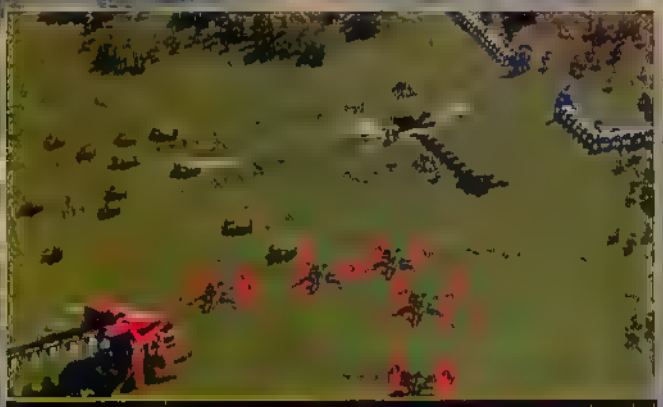
FIGHTING FOR

Supreme Commander takes charge

"THE ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS FORMULA WORKED GREAT BACK WHEN WE ONLY HAD 4.77MHZ PCS"

CHRIS TAYLOR, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT GAS POWERED GAMES

SUPREMACY



ROCK, PAPER, EXPLOSIONS

Most RTS titles traditionally employ a system of checks and balances: Cavalry kills infantry, infantry kills archers, and archers kill cavalry—or some variation thereof. Here, all bets are off. "I believe the rock-paper-scissors formula worked great...back when we only had 4.77MHz PCs," Taylor muses. "Today, we have billions of cycles of computer horsepower at our disposal, and it's time to put that power to work. The idea [with *Supreme Commander*] is that a unit's power, speed, maneuverability, armor, and such are [valued] in direct correlation to its cost."

BIGGER IS BETTER

Taylor says size matters: "When designing [a game], I like to ask myself: Is the genre in a particular groove because of design vision or because of technological restriction? I think the answer to this question, when considering scope and scale [in] RTS games, is the latter." With *Supreme Commander*, Taylor hopes to clear those technological hurdles, so expect to see units of truly massive proportions. These battleships provide a good indication of what you can look forward to—and we hear some units extend several full screens in length.

THE ART OF STRATEGY

In Taylor's eyes, most modern strategy games amount to little more than resource races, in which the commander with the largest number of units usually comes out on top. "The strategy game genre has largely been light on strategy and heavy on tactics; I have often joked [that] it should be called the RTT genre. [I] want to make players think twice before blindly walking through the tech tree with a 'can't lose' sequence of build operations." He promises a different situation this time around, with circumstances that force more strategic thinking and less hoarding troops en masse. One early example: new radar and sonar mechanics. "An aircraft that shows up on radar remains unidentified until a visual is obtained, after which [it stays] identified as long as it's inside radar-covered areas." While radar tracks aerial units, such as this wing of fighters, sonar works much the same way for naval units. "We call this part of the game the 'Intelligence War,'" Taylor explains. "It strongly introduces players to the concept of [gathering] intelligence on opponents and underscores the importance of knowing the opponent's position, strengths, and weaknesses before formulating a strategy and [investing in] the appropriate units and systems."

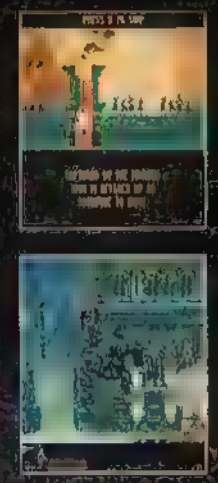
ELECTRIC MAYHEM

Messing around online. This month's [illegible] of Villains by Scott Sharkey

KING KONG

THE OFFICIAL MOBILE GAME OF THE MOVIE

KEYWORD: VZ1



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Standard SMS and data charges apply

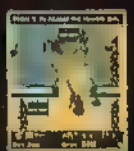
Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

KEYWORD: VZ2

MIDNIGHT POOL

KEYWORD: VZ3

BROTHERS IN ARMS



KEYWORD: VZ4

ASPHALT

KEYWORD: VZ5

PLATINUM SOLITAIRE

KEYWORD: VZ6

verizon wireless

UNIVERSAL SEE THE MOVIE

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PUBLIC ACCESS

A finger on the pulse of PC gaming fringe culture

ON THE DISC
Get these comics, movies, and maps!

GAME [illegible] MAKE [illegible] BUY 'EM. BUT WHAT [illegible] next [illegible] when a game goes online. Shawn Elliott

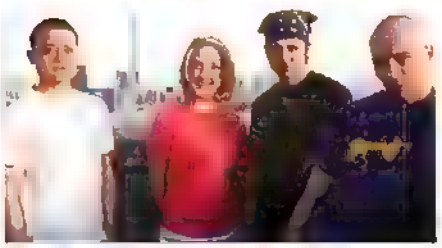
FUNNY FREEMAN

CHRISTOPHER LIVINGSTON, CREATOR of send-up comic *Concerned: The Half-Life and Death of Gordon Frohman*, admits that his *HL2* funny pages aren't the first. It's just that the others aren't as endearingly rough around the edges. "Some of 'em—*Apostasy*, for example—you could literally slap on a comic-book rack and sell," Livingston says. "To set myself apart, I needed to do something drastic, like avoid writing any story line whatsoever. I mean, Valve already wrote one—why not take my character and put him in the same situations that they came up with? Plus, I have no design or layout skills, and I can barely use Photoshop. So I think that's what I try to accomplish: a comic strip with a completely unoriginal story line; a boring, repetitive layout; and an utter lack of eye-catching effects. And, while I don't like to toot my own horn, I think I've succeeded."

Livingston, whose strips skewer shooter conventions from combustible barrels to *Counter-Strike* gibberish, says his ideas stem from "specific aspects of games that stick in my head. And I think every gamer stops suspending his or her disbelief at some point and says, 'Hey, how come I can carry a menagerie of guns, a missile launcher, a crossbow, and grenades, and somehow still swim and climb ladders?'"

When asked if he feels limited by *Garry's Mod*, the character- and prop-posing tool that he creates with, Livingston assures us it's not an issue: "I'm sort of confining myself to models that actually appear in *Half-Life 2*, but I'm sure if I needed a Frohman in a dress or lederhosen, someone has already made one, is making one, or would make one if I asked nicely. And for the record, I do not need a Frohman in lederhosen."

PHOTOGRAPH BY SEAN JAMES BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY



▲ The *Pure Pwnage* posse.

GOOF TROUPE

LOCKED IN A NOT-SO-DEADLY DUEL, Internet numbskull Jeremy and ninja Teh_Masterer swing keyboards like samurai swords, and, later, resort to pantomiming WASD inputs in a form of kung fu parody. No, these warriors aren't fighting online—they're face-to-face in episode four of Web show *Pure Pwnage*. Another gag—think of the series as a gamers' version of *Mad TV*—pokes fun at hot-to-trot *World of WarCraft* players with an adult contemporary ditty (à la *Aladdin*'s "A Whole New World").

We chat with *Pure Pwnage*'s Jeremy and Kyle (they'd rather not tell us their last names) about what comes next.

CGW: What are your day jobs?

Kyle: I'm still in school, so I suppose that *Pure Pwnage* is my day job. I am graduating film school soon, though, and it's nice to already have work making the movies that I like to make.

Jeremy: LOL. That's a good one.

CGW: Do you know people like your characters in real life, or are you extrapolating from what you see in-game?

Kyle: Yeah, we pretty much are our characters. Some of the stuff in the show is made up, but most of it's about our lives.

Jeremy: Characters extrapolating...what? You mean, "Do I really pwn that much?" No doubt.

CGW: Using "Console Style" seemed like sheer foolishness on the Teh_Masterer's part during his duel in episode four. Was he desperate at that point or what?

Jeremy: That was a dream I had. Kyle remade it for the show. Don't underestimate the power of Console Style, though—keyboards can only accomplish so much.

CGW: Which episode would you say has proved the most popular so far?

Kyle: Based on ratings and comments, it seems like most people enjoyed episodes four and six. The stuff with FPS Doug is also popular with FPS fans.

CGW: Speaking of episode six, where'd you find vocalists willing to croon about *World of WarCraft*'s "instanced farming runs"?

Kyle: I know the singers from school. They had no idea what they were even saying...which is why they're laughing at the end.

CGW: So what's next for the series?

Kyle: We're hard at work making episode nine, which we'll screen in advance at a Toronto theater. In total, we're planning for three seasons. The first will end after episode 12, at which point we'll release a DVD along with the much-requested *Pure Pwnage* soundtrack. (We get a lot of mail asking for the name of this or that song from various episodes, but what most people don't realize is that all of our music is original material.) Once the show is done, we want to make *Pure Pwnage: The Movie*.

CGW: So this is something you see yourselves profiting from?

Kyle: We're selling enough T-shirts to be able to buy some better production equipment, so expect increased quality in the next episode. And with the way our audience is growing, I'm sure we'll be able to go full-time with things in the near future.

CGW: Last Q: How's your hate mail?

Jeremy: N00bs whine. It's what they do.

THINK OF *PURE PWNAGE* AS A GAMERS' VERSION OF *MAD TV*.

WE WANT YOU

Going to great lengths for love of the game? Send your community story to [illegible]

MAP QUEST

BATTLEFIELD 2 FIENDS WANT MORE urban maps—somewhat smaller in scale so that infantry is never far from a firefight, and with loads of alleyways and rooftops to level the field for the trooper fending off tanks. Mapmaker Jarst Illingworth has just the thing with Strike at Karkand 2, "sequel" to the fan-favorite official map and available on our demo disc.

"I set out to create a new city north of the original Karkand," Illingworth says. "As with all the other levels I've designed, I started simple by plotting it out on paper. The challenge was laying out a city that looked practical yet still supported a purposeful and fun game flow—I had to keep things balanced by creating a kind of circularity with multiple ways to assault each flag, and an equal number of methods to defend them. And that holds especially true for the mosque area: As the first checkpoint between the MEC forces and the USMC, it had to facilitate fierce large-, medium-, and small-scale fighting."

MUST-TRY TACTICS FROM KARKAND 2'S MAKER:

"Use the boathouse north of the bridges and west of the MEC mountain base, as it offers an additional, stealthy route across the river. Come at it during the MEC rush into the city and you'll capture a key flag far behind the hot zones."

"Karkand 2's rooftops are an asset to both armies and offer vantage points over enemy bases. Get high, and you can then alert any squadmates on the ground about enemy forces."

"Good maps are built with options in mind—take some time to analyze the surrounding structures and mix up your game plan. It's a general tactic and goes for any map, but many players stick to the same path and as a result they get fragged again and again."

▲ Rooftops rock: Get to high ground.

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TOY

Playmobil Security Check-in

$13 AMAZON.COM

We live in a dangerous world these days, and the sooner kids know about it and become as paranoid as the rest of us, the better. What better way to introduce them to a culture of fear and high surveillance than with a toy airport security set? That's right, you too can thrill to the adventures of overworked airport staff that make you throw out dangerous nail clippers. The set isn't entirely realistic: our tiny plastic pals don't have to remove their shoes or belts and aren't hassled for their Zippo lighters. What's next, a Playmobil Abu-Ghraib interrogation play set?

MUSIC

Danger Doom: The Mouse and the Mask

$12 AMAZON.COM

Dangermouse. MF Doom. Combine these two devilous hip-hop madmen and you have a musical master plan for world domination. *The Mouse and the Mask*, their collaborative CD, is an amazing blend of DM's well-crafted soundscapes and Doom's obsession with superheroics. Other rappers, including Ghostface Killah, also show up to save the day, but you want the best selling point? Cartoon Network's Adult Swim line-up inspires the disc, and the disc includes skits and character voiceovers from some of the more popular shows, including *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law* and *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*. Buy it for the music, stay for the weirdness.

BOOK

Smartbomb

$16 AMAZON.COM

Freelance journalists Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby's new book, *Smartbomb: The Quest for Art, Entertainment, and Big Bucks in the Videogame Revolution*, is an interesting look at the people inside the business. What could have devolved into a "gee-whiz" look at how people are actually earning good money by making and playing games is instead a smart behind-the-scenes look at the game industry, from trade shows to LAN tournaments, that includes interviews with high-profile guys like Cliffy B and real, live gamers like you. It's a good book for folks who still think that videogames are just child's play.

DVD

Undeclared: The Complete Series

$37 AMAZON.COM

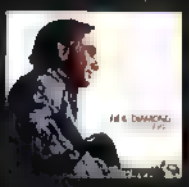
Judd Apatow can't catch a break. First, he puts together the incredibly funny NBC series *Freaks and Geeks*. The critics rightly loved it, but nobody watched. Next came *Undeclared*. Hands-down one of the funnier shows in years, *Undeclared* chronicles the lives of college freshmen at the University of North Eastern California. And what a first year they had. Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell, Fred Willard, Ben Stiller—heck, even Ted Nugent made appearances on this show. So what did Fox do with this promising new series? Cancelled it, of course.

MAGAZINE

Make

$10 AMAZON.COM

What the heck are we doing promoting another magazine? Friends, *Make* is a magazine like no other. It's a do-it-yourselfer's bible that is well written and extremely hardcore. Want a short list of some of the things covered in past issues? Here we go: podcasting, modding your car, building robots, constructing your own speakers from the ground up, building a rail gun (campers beware!), and turning your old VCR into a cat feeder. We're not kidding about that last one. As you can gather, this a rag by geeks, for geeks. Grab a copy of the quarterly pub and revel in the hardcore nerdiness for yourself.



MUSIC

Neil Diamond: 12 Songs

$11 AMAZON.COM

Neil Diamond has always been cool. It's you who failed to recognize it. The fact is, Franz Ferdinand and the Strokes and all the rest of those newbie poseurs can make CDs for the next two decades, and they'll never write a song as cool as "Cherry, Cherry." Now, thanks to übergod producer Rick Rubin, Neil Diamond is "officially" cool. Doing the same thing that he did for Johnny Cash, Rick Rubin strips Neil Diamond down to his essence—getting rid of all the schlock—so we can hear him for the great singer and songwriter that he is. Jump on the bandwagon now and pretend that you always liked him. But iPod users beware: This has Sony's lame protection on it.

POCKET CHANGE: $1.00

PIPELINE

Save some money for these upcoming games

DECEMBER 2005	PUBLISHER
Hammer & Sickle	2K Games
L.A. Rush	Midway
Prince of Persia The Two Thrones	Ubisoft
JANUARY 2006	
25 to Life	Eidos
Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos
Jaws Unleashed	Majesco
Just Cause	Eidos
Scarface: The World Is Yours	VU Games
FEBRUARY 2006	
The Apprentice	VU Games
Battleground Europe: World War II Online	Tri Synergy
Commandos Strike Force	Eidos
Company of Heroes	THQ
Curious George	Namco
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	Funcom
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	Atari
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Bethesda Softworks
Fear & Respect	Midway
Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords	2K Games
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft
The Godfather	Electronic Arts
Hellgate: London	Namco
Heroes of Might and Magic V	Ubisoft
The Lord of the Rings Online	Turbine
Origin of the Species	Tri Synergy
Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War	Midway
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	THQ
Snow	2K Games
Star Wars Empire at War	LucasArts
Stargate SG-1: The Alliance	Namco
Tabula Rasa	NCsoft
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Valve Software
Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
MARCH 2006	
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	2K Games
Enemy in Sight	Atari
Mage Knight: Apocalypse	Namco
Prey	2K Games

CALL IT A FRIENDLY GATHERING...

...a cheery online battle with a few of your closest pals. You hunt down a few terrorists, blow off some heads with your sniper rifle, and use night vision to stalk each other in the dark. In the world of Rainbow Six, only one rule of friendship applies: watch your back if you want to get out alive.

Optimized for the PC with enhanced graphics, unnerving AI, and classic, pulse-pounding close-quarter battles.

Featuring new cutting-edge technology like motion sensors, surveillance PDAs and 42 customizable weapons.

The total multiplayer experience, including signature Co-op and Deathmatch modes, plus the all-new "class-based" mode.

Tom Clancy's

RAINBOW SIX LOCKDOWN

MATURE 17+ M Blood Language Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

Red Storm

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UBISOFT

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Developed By

RAVEN SOFTWARE

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XBOX 360

PC CD ROM

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MATURE 17+

M

ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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ULTIMATE WAR...
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In a war for Earth's survival, against an unrelenting enemy – the only way to defeat them, is to become one of them.
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Fight with the support of an elite squad
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Compete online in fast action, arena-style multiplayer
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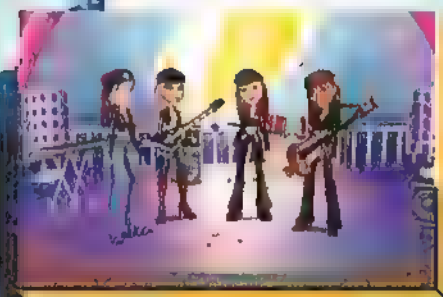
NOW AVAILABLE ON XBOX 360 and PC

Santa's LITTLE HELPER

[illegible] by Carrie Shepherd

PC gaming is your obsession, so here's one more excuse to [illegible] don't think that it's as [illegible] you see in their age range. The kiddie-game aisle is a perilous place, laced with an [illegible] wonders and huge blunders. To make [illegible] are some of the latest gams for the little [illegible] they've been naughty or nice.



BRATZ: ROCK ANGELZ

PUBLISHER THQ PRICE $19.99 RATED E

Kids help the Bratz gals—known for their Angelina Jolie–like lips and rock star attire—start up their own fashion magazine. Love it or hate it, this is the stuff of tween-girl dreams. So brace yourself: The "fun" rebellious years are almost upon you.

They'll love: High cool factor

You'll love: Music that's actually sorta hip

Reason to regift: Short skirts and tight pants

For: Diminutive fashionistas

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

PUBLISHER EA PRICE $29.99 RATED E10+

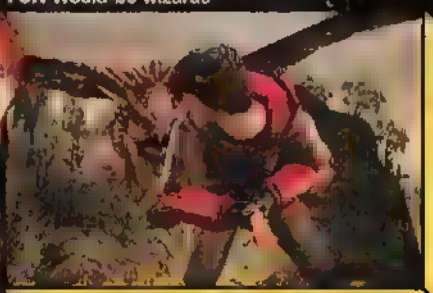
Another fantasy-fulfiller, *Goblet of Fire* is all about using teamwork—working with friends or A.I. characters—to produce powerful spells, good for moving obstacles and defeating dugbogs, Death Eaters, and Hungarian horntail dragons.

They'll love: Using the Accio summoning charm to grab rewards

You'll love: That it's cheaper than seeing the *Harry Potter* movie every day during winter break

Reason to regift: Incites offspring to run around yelling, "Wingardium leviosa!"

For: Would-be wizards



Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

DISNEY'S CHICKEN LITTLE

PUBLISHER THQ PRICE $19.99 RATED E10+

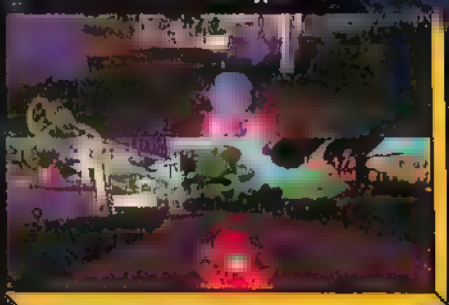
Disney's Chicken Little continues the film's story line in a 3D game packed with 21 levels of nonstop action.

They'll love: Gadgets including slingshots, cannons, soda bottle rockets, and yo-yos

You'll love: Don Knotts as the mayor

Reason to regift: Hefty system requirements (Pentium 4 1.4GHz processor, 64MB DirectX 9–compatible videocard) might bring the kids to your PC instead of the hand-me-down you gave them

For: Bouncin'-off-the-wall types



Disney's Chicken Little

CABBAGE PATCH KIDS: WHERE'S MY PONY?

PUBLISHER: D3 Publisher PRICE: $19.99 RATED: E

Back from the '80s, the Cabbage Patch Kids are now invading PCs with their dimpled (yet creepily oversized) faces and positive attitudes. *Where's My Pony* is a genuine adventure game for the preschool set, with fetch quests and puzzles that negate a passive sit-and-watch experience: Kids have to figure out how to open latches and remove trees from paths to get their pony back to its owner.

They'll love: Exploring and completing goals
You'll love: Its utter placidity
Reason to regift: Characters are a little too reminiscent of the time Uncle Alvin pulled a stocking over his face. Scary!
For: Your own baby

CREATURES: VILLAGE

PUBLISHER: Kuteka Interactive
PRICE: $19.99 RATED: E

The Norns from *Creatures* are back in an open-ended game targeted to grade-schoolers. Kids hatch and raise these virtual life forms; each Norn makes its own decisions and learns from its experiences. *Village* has 15 environments with weather and seasons; activities range from baking a cake to flying through CloudLand in a sky boat.

They'll love: Experimenting with breeding
You'll love: Being able to put off getting a dog
Reason to regift: Norns have to be trained—and they don't always listen
For: Future Dr. Frankensteins

ED, EDD N EDDY: THE MIS-EDVENTURES

PUBLISHER: Midway PRICE: $29.99 RATED: E

The three Eds from the Cartoon Network bring a dose of wackiness to this frenzied action game. Kids use the abilities of each Ed on the fly and perform special multi-Ed formations like the Trampol-Edd, Tower of Eddy, and Batter-Ed. As they complete scam objectives, like selling snow cones to neighborhood kids, they'll open up new areas of the game.

They'll love: Smashing stuff with their head when playing as Ed
You'll love: Brainy Edd's good example
Reason to regift: El Mongo Stink Bomb!
For: The class crack-up

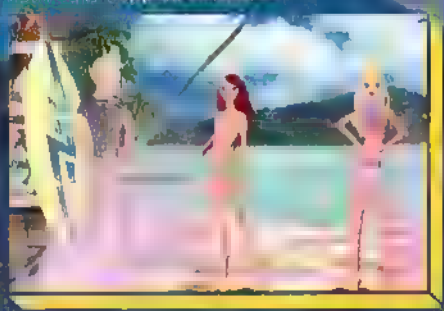
Ed, Edd n Eddy: The Mis-edventures

MY SCENE GOES HOLLYWOOD

PUBLISHER: VU Games PRICE: $29.99 RATED: E

It's not exactly *The Movies* for little girls, but *My Scene Goes Hollywood* indulges the movie-making aspiration, allowing kids to step into the pumps of the My Scene girls (that's the *au current* version of Barbie for you noobs)—Barbie, Delancey, Chelsea, Madison, and Nolee—as they help finish a script, design sets, pick music and sound effects, make movie posters, and (naturally) design costumes and do makeovers for the big screen.

They'll love: Combination of do-it-all Barbie with Hollywood dreams
You'll love: That it inspires creativity
Reason to regift: Reinforces girly stereotypes
For: Sofia Coppola wannabes



My Scene Goes Hollywood

[illegible] NARNIA

PUBLISHER: Buena Vista Games
PRICE: $39.99 RATED: T

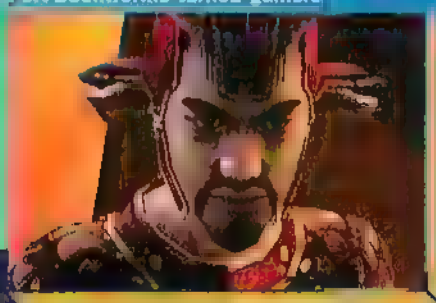
[illegible] has come to end that darned 100 year enchanted winter in Narnia once and for all. To do it, kids will need to take on the persona of one of the Pevensie children: Peter, Susan, Edmund, or Lucy. Each Pevensie has unique skills, but as a team they can defeat even the most formidable Minotaurs and Cyclops. To that end, two kids can play together on the same PC using the keyboard or with a USB gamepad or joystick.

They'll love: Plenty of action in 15 levels [illegible] porating 30 clips from the movie

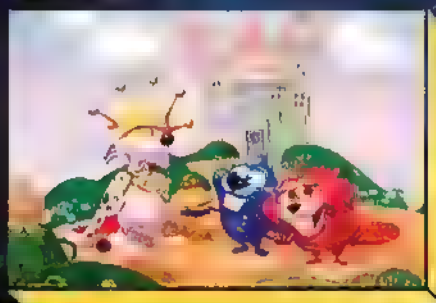
You'll love: That it forces kids to cooperate for once

Reason to regift: Kids decide to use their newfound cooperation skills against you

For: Bookworms-turned-gamers



>The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe



DIDI & DITTO FIRST GRADE: THE WOLF KING

PUBLISHER: Kutoka PRICE: $19.99
RATED: Ages 6-7 [no ESRB rating]

As beavers Didi and Ditto, kids must save their land from the evil Wolf King using math, science, literacy, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

They'll love: Collecting flags and medallions as they outsmart the wolf

You'll love: Curriculum disguised as fun

Reason to regift: Kids see through your scheme of making them learn while gaming

For: Smarty-pants first-graders

NEMO: LEARNING WITH NEMO

PUBLISHER: Buena Vista Games
PRICE: $19.99 RATED: EC

The littlest giftees on your list will love these sea-themed activities that reinforce kindergarten skills like color, shape, pattern, number, and letter identification.

They'll love: Bright colors and familiar characters

You'll love: That it's so easy to use, you won't need to supervise

Reason to regift: Nemo is so 2003

For: Little Poindexters

DISNEY'S CINDERELLA DOLLHOUSE 2

PUBLISHER: Buena Vista Games
PRICE: $19.99 RATED: E

Every little girl starts off with this pipe dream of being a little princess. So what better way to prepare them for a life of royalty than with *Cinderella Dollhouse 2*? Kids plan and prepare for Cinderella's special events, making flower arrangements, decorating cakes and royal rooms, and learning princess etiquette. So, all you members of the royal family reading our magazine, go out and grab this game. It'll feel just like a sim game of your lives!

They'll love: Actually printing their own invitations

You'll love: Disney-quality animation

Reason to regift: Daughter starts saying, "It's a good thing"

For: Divas in training

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: LIGHTS, CAMERA, PANTS!

PUBLISHER: THQ PRICE: $19.99 RATED: E

As kids help SpongeBob scour Bikini Bottom for actors and props for a special episode of *The New Adventures of Mermaidman and Barnacleboy*, they indulge in minigames like checkers and rounding up jellyfish.

They'll love: Assigning roles and props for the show

You'll love: The clever humor, which in the right frame of mind can be as fun as a lava lamp

Reason to regift: Games might be too low-tech for more sophisticated kids

For: Sponge aficionados

>SpongeBob Squarepants: Lights, Camera, Pants!

THE INCREDIBLES: RISE OF THE UNDERMINER

PUBLISHER: THQ PRICE: $19.99 RATED: E

Picking up right after where the movie leaves off, Frozone and Mr. Incredible are out to get the evil Underminer. The more villains they defeat, the better their powers become. This fun little beat-em-up game is something you probably will enjoy playing with them.

They'll love: Freezing enemies and building ice bridges as Frozone

You'll love: Continuing the action from the movie without having to watch the DVD for the millionth time

Reason to regift: The kids won't let you join the game

For: Superheroic half-pints

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ONLINE EVOLUTION

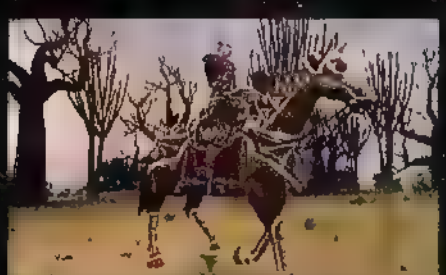
Is there life beyond elves and dwarves?

DRAGON SLAYERS

POP QUIZ TIME: MASSIVELY MULTIplayer online games evolved from (A) multiuser dungeons (MUDs), (B) pen-and-paper RPGs, (C) Cheeto crumbs, or (D) all of the above.

If you guessed answer D you are correct, except maybe for the Cheeto crumb part. Today's MMOs are direct descendents of the MUDs of the late '70s and '80s, in which groups of players joined online bulletin boards to share in text-based fantasy adventures. But the MUDs, in turn, drew their primary inspiration from pen-and-paper fantasy RPGs like *Dungeons & Dragons*, which was first published way back in 1974.

Those tabletop RPGs clearly inform today's online dragon slaying—so much so, in fact, that almost every successful MMO to date has been set in a fantasy-RPG setting. We've played as elves, fairies, and dwarves in *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Asheron's Call*, and, of course, *World of WarCraft*.



▲ Mythic's *Dark Age of Camelot* is set firmly in a traditional, familiar high-fantasy MMO world.

Are we really that happy to hang out with orcs all the time? Apparently, yes. According to mmogchart.com, an MMO research site run by Bruce Sterling Woodcock, fantasy-based RPGs account for approximately 85 percent of the market share of all current MMO players. Aside from the recent exception of *City of Heroes* (which lets us swap out our leather elven tights for spandex superhero tights), most games that don't let us brandish +3 battleaxes of dorkdom and slay mightye beastes have fallen over like level 1 rats. Even franchises that previously seemed like licenses to print money have disappointed: *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, and *The Sims* all fell far short of expectations with their MMOs.

At the same time, online fantasy-themed games continue to garner players. While *WOW*'s 4 million subscribers puts the game in a category of its own, there are also hundreds of thousands of gamers packing the servers in *Final Fantasy XI*, *EverQuest* and its sequel, and other games.

NERD COMFORT FOOD

So why are we interested only in slaying dragons? Ryan Seabury, the design director for NCsoft's upcoming *Auto Assault*, theorizes, "Fantasy isn't necessarily 'cooler' than other settings, but it is more comfortable for a lot of people, both in development and as a gamer. Fantasy settings provide a sort of automatic comfort level for a character-based game. Everyone knows what orcs, elves, warriors, and wizards are supposed to be and do, so you can quickly get the setting and get right into the game. You usually have a nice polarized conflict between good and evil in traditional fantasy settings, which is a nice escape from the gray scales of reality. Contrast that to more abstract present or futuristic settings, where you might have to explain the game world and the expected roles a little more to begin with."

EverQuest II senior producer Scott Hartsman seconds this. "There are strong archetypes in fantasy," he explains. "Many people (whether they'd admit it as adults or not!) already have a sense of what makes for a consistent fantasy world. If I told an average person who is inexperienced with MMOs that I was making a fantasy world where dwarves were 10 feet tall and dragons were timid little creatures that lived in little holes in the wall and only came out at night to scavenge for cheese, they could pick that out as dead wrong before I got to the end of the sentence.

"With a traditional fantasy setting, a lot of the 'work' of having to clearly communicate a consistent environment is already done and waiting inside people's heads, ripe for building new content and gameplay knowledge right on top of the player's preexisting familiarity, knowledge, and, therefore, fondness for the world."

Another factor in the popularity of the genre is the type of player likely to spend time and money online. Michael Pachter, a gaming-industry analyst for Wedbush Morgan Securities, says, "I don't think that other genres lend

themselves to the immersive experience that will keep a player paying a monthly fee for a long period of time. There's only so far you can go in *Battlefield* before it gets old. Ditto sports. The point is that fantasy is for hardcore 30-plus-hour-per-week players, while the other genres are somewhat more casual."

Companies need those hardcore players if they want to succeed, because hardcore players are the ones willing to keep paying the monthly subscription. EA Games learned this the hard way with a couple of its thwarted attempts at entering the MMO space. *Motor City Online*, which was essentially an offshoot of the popular *Need for Speed* racing franchise, was shut down after only two years. And *The Sims Online*, while still active, has dropped, according to mmogchart.com, from a peak subscriber base of just over 100,000 to less than 30,000—nowhere near what anyone expected from the best-selling gaming franchise of all time. In both those cases, the game designs themselves might have been at least part of the problem. But the bigger and tougher question is whether the games would have garnered sizeable audiences even if the gameplay had been perfect.

ELVES, ELVES, AND MORE ELVES

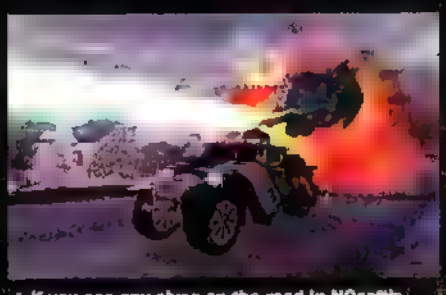
For some gamemakers, the question is not even worth asking. With the millions of dollars in development costs for MMOs, it makes good financial sense for developers to want to stick with what has worked. And that's why you've got a new slew of games—*Dungeons &*

▼ *City of Heroes* is the big non-fantasy MMO success story.

>> STAR WARS, THE MATRIX, AND THE SIMS ALL FELL FAR SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS.

Dragons Online, *Warhammer Online*, *Vanguard*, *The Lord of the Rings Online*—that aren't breaking any barriers in terms of their settings. (This isn't a judgment against these games, by the way—just an observation on their content.)

Thomas Terrazas, the producer for SOE's groundbreaking *PlanetSide*, doesn't think this is a good thing. "I think that most developers have held back a little when it comes to using unconventional methods," he says. "You've got to have a lot of balls to come out and try something new that many people have thought about but never had the guts to try. Let's face it, with



▲ If you see any elves on the road in NCsoft's upcoming *Auto Assault*, run them over.

Say "Yaar!" to *Pirates of the Burning Sea*.

long development cycles and a ton of money to make a game, not too many people are going to go against the grain."

Mike O'Brien, the head of ArenaNet's *Guild Wars* design team, thinks that game companies are only hurting themselves by sticking with what's been proven. "I do think there's more of a market for unique MMO styles than most publishers realize," he says. "I know that other publishers are looking closely at the successes of *City of Heroes* and *Guild Wars* and are drawing lessons from them. I hope they draw the right lessons. The right lesson is, 'Players are really hungry for something new and will strongly support innovative new games.' The wrong lesson is, 'Hey, a game about comic-book heroes was successful! Let's clone it!'"

Similarly, while the huge success of *World of WarCraft* is inevitably going to lead to a bunch of copycat designs and further convince publishers that they should jump on the fantasy bandwagon, the real lessons the game provides have to do with gameplay mechanics and user friendliness, not the fact that *WOW* is another game with dwarves.

"Game-design-wise, *WOW*'s success proves in a very strong way what I had hoped for years was true," says *Auto Assault*'s Seabury, "which is that fun games are what people really want. I've often felt the first-generation MMOGs were built by sadomasochists, despite their success. There were so many punishing, tedious systems and mechanics that made those first games great for someone, for example, who might enjoy peeling their fingernails backward very slowly, just to say they could do it."

The Sims Online was supposed to be the breakthrough MMO. But players stayed away in droves.

"I'M STILL WAITING FOR MY WESTERN MMO SO I CAN PLAY COWBOYS AND INDIANS ONLINE." —THOMAS TERRAZAS, PRODUCER OF SOE'S *PLANETSIDE*

KEEP HOPE ALIVE

OK, so if we agree that developers shouldn't be making *World of CloneCraft*, what should they be doing?

David "Zeb" Cook, senior designer at Cryptic Studios, thinks that companies can look at the past and use it to move forward. "MMOs are moving out of their adolescent stage," he explains. "There is a body of experience that we can now draw on to move MMOs into the next phase. There is more knowledge about how people actually play these games, which is big because now games can be better shaped to the needs of the player instead of forcing the player to adapt to the game. One of the great things about *City of Heroes* was that it broke out of the traditional 'kill the rat' low-level grind and got you into playing and being a hero immediately. People like that."

In terms of genre, developers need to not be discouraged by past failures, which, as we've said, may have had less to do with games not being fantasy-based than with them being poorly designed. Similarly, developers need to embrace the genre they're working in completely, rather than just make, say, *World of WarCraft* in space.

"Surely science fiction is cooler than fantasy!" says Reynir Harðarson, creative director at CCP (*Eve Online*). "A 1.1-gigaton dreadnought in flames is undeniably cool. But because of the success of fantasy-based MMOs, developers have been trying to stretch that model to fit their sci-fi games. Why would anyone want to play a sci-fi game that is, in essence an *EverQuest* clone with robots instead of dragons? In that case, we would rather just play *EQ*. Dancing aliens just don't spell sci-fi."

"We have lots of shared cultural mythos that games could be based on," says ArenaNet's O'Brien. "The pyramids of ancient Egypt, the Greek gods and Mount Olympus, Hades, pirates and swashbuckling, ninjas and samurai, comic-book heroes, the Wild West, the first explorations into deep Africa, World Wars I and II. Some settings are more suited than others to supporting what game designers are often looking for: larger-than-life heroes, magical or supernatural abilities, and a good variety of different character classes, appearances, and abilities."

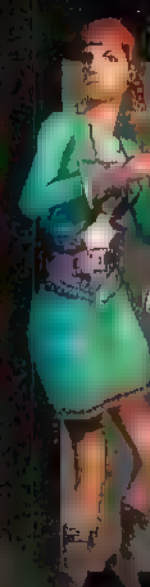
The proliferation of broadband, which has cut down on lag issues, and the success of multiplayer online shooters like *Battlefield 2* also point the way toward the future. "Technically, *BF2* could qualify as an MMOG," says Erik Krebs, lead designer of *The Matrix Online*. "It has a lot of people playing simultaneously, and if you are playing on ranked servers, there is a sense of persistence. I play regularly and find the game very exciting. I would probably pay a reasonable monthly fee to play on ranked EA-hosted servers." (See our story on page 30.)

Krebs continues, "Up to now there hasn't been an MMOG which has grabbed the attention of the same masses that play *Half-Life*, *Quake*, *Unreal*, and *Doom* to convince them to pay a monthly fee. We came close with *PlanetSide*, and we have a great dedicated group that plays, but there is a lot more we could explore with the FPS genre. It's clear the RPG genre has been covered pretty adequately in the MMO space at this point. It is time for developers to start creating games that use other genres or create entirely new genres. The market is ready for new games that innovate instead of replicate."

"The world is our oyster," says Terrazas. "I'm still waiting for my Western MMO to play cowboys and Indians—if anyone is listening out there."

We are. And we agree./**Ryan Scott, Kristen Salvatore, Jeff Green, Dana Jongewaard**

CGW SAYS...



It isn't all elves and dwarves. Big props go to Sony Online's *PlanetSide* for paving the way years ahead of its time, for upcoming "MMOFPS" games like Wabzanby's *Huxley*. And Nexon is currently making a great reputation for itself by breaking away from the fantasy phenomenon with the City of Heroes/Villains games and the upcoming MMO car-combat game *Auto Assault*. Linden Lab is doing all kinds of weird genre-bending things in *Second Life* (www.secondlife.com), a combination MMO, bulletin board, auction site, and virtual land grab. And, yessss! We couldn't be more excited for Flying Lab's upcoming *Pirates of the Burning Sea*, the MMO that will finally let [illegible] in the online world.

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PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Splash Damage
GENRE: Multiplayer FPS
RELEASE DATE: "When it's ready..."

ON THE DISC
PLAY: *CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY!*

F WORLDS

A former mod squad hits the big time as developer of Activision's newest WMD—*Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*

BY DARREN GLADSTONE

▲ The strogg Icarus antigravity packs hover just off the ground and allow for small jumps—perfect for stealth missions.

EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

EARTH, 2065: AFTER YEARS OF SEARCHING THE STARS, we are finally contacted by a sentient extraterrestrial species, the strogg. Half men, half machines, they definitely don't come in peace. Crap.

England, today: Thirty minutes outside London in the town of Bromley, 25 people plot mankind's untimely eradication. Just look for the one-floor office with the nice cars parked in front. Inside, Paul "Locki" Wedgwood and the rest of the Splash Damage team are hard at work on *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. Wedgwood, the burgeoning company's managing director and game designer, goes out of his way to first apologetically "warn" us that every screenshot you see littering the next few pages is based off a pre-alpha build of the game. Friend, the only thing you have to apologize for is teasing us. Even at this point, *Quake Wars*' graphics look amazing. Then again, one expects a degree of graphical slickness from the *Doom 3* engine.

Hold on. *Enemy Territory*, a game that promises massive outdoor battles, massive maps, and a massive attention to detail, uses the same engine that created *Doom 3*? But there are no claustrophobic corridor crawls with the lights out. No monster closets. This is a far cry from id Software's demonic FPS. What's amazing—beyond the technology that's pushing *Enemy Territory* well past the constraints of the original game engine and the multiplayer combat (we'll get to all that soon enough)—is that this sci-fi *Battlefield 2* killer is Splash Damage's first true commercial release.

DEVELOPER'S TERRITORY

Wedgwood and company already know what people want. After all, they worked with id Software's Kevin Cloud and Robert Duffy to create *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*. The totally free stand-alone multiplayer game (which is on this month's disc) has garnered awards worldwide. "Two and a half years after its release and [*RTCW:ET*] is still one of the more popular multiplayer games online," Wedgwood humbly submits.

Splash Damage worked with Cloud on his plan, the basis for the first *Enemy Territory*. Rather than create a sports-arena-like multiplayer experience, as in *Quake III: Arena* or the *Unreal Tournament* games, they wanted to re-create war—two teams, in the field, accomplishing mission-based objectives (kind of like *Team Fortress*, the game Wedgwood loved and helped port over into *Quake: Team Fortress* as a modder). The first implementation would be an expansion for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. But early on, even while in the middle of developing *RTCW:ET*, Wedgwood and Cloud were talking about the future.

"*Enemy Territory* is a new intellectual property that we want to take to different universes," says Cloud. Does this mean there will be a UAC-versus-demons spin on *ET* in the future? "Anything's possible," he laughs, "but we can only handle one thing at a time. We're obviously focusing on getting this game out the door first." Basing this *Enemy Territory* game in the Quake universe, though, is the obvious choice.

"We loved the idea of the conventional Earth military combat versus this kind of invading alien race with high technology and still preserving balanced gameplay. Ultimately," recalls Wedgwood, "we wanted to do something more than create a fight that amounted to little more than two sides equally equipped but wearing different hats."

And they have. ▸

THE WAR ROOM

A breakdown of the battlefield

COURSES OF ACTION

Every map, according to Wedgwood, will have all sorts of escape routes. "Every piece of geometry in the game," he says, "is potential cover or a potential jump." The asphalt roads are best suited for big vehicles like the mobile command center, which can get stuck in the mud. There are off-track areas like dirt roads for every other wheeled vehicle. Small trenches offer soldiers safe passage to creep through on foot. Each map will even have routes made to benefit specific vehicles—like a ramp at the end of a pier, letting you jump a river Evel Knievel style.

PLAN OF ATTACK

If you played *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* or *UT2004*'s Onslaught mode, you're familiar with the idea of controlling the flow of battle. Instead of aimlessly scrambling all over, both sides get steered to the action. This illustration shows one map in progress.

DEPLOYMENT

One of the cooler elements incorporated into the battle is that everyone can call in class-specific backup. An engineer, for example, can order up a mobile radar dish to spot enemies. Just look for some steady ground (shaded in green) and wait for the supply drop. Someone blew up your ride? You can do the equivalent of calling AAA to airlift a replacement to you in the field. Then there are the really cool classes, like the field commander, which can call in air and artillery strikes while fighting enemies. The one thing you don't need to deal with: gathering resources.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Interesting fact: According to Jeff Morris, a producer at Epic Games, a surprisingly large number of people prefer to play *Unreal Tournament 2004* offline against bots. *ETQW* will have none of that. The team has no plans for bots or an offline mode, save for maybe some basic training. The general design philosophy is to make people experience the game online, as part of a team.

But what about those poor, defenseless newbies who have no clue about what to do next? "*World of WarCraft* does a fantastic job of teaching people how to play without them feeling like it," says Wedgwood. Hence, the solo mission system will help ease people into the game. The host server sees what's happening all across the game and gives each player class-specific objectives that they can accept. These minimissions help teach the nuances of each player class in the game, while helping the greater cause in a multiplayer firelight.

ACE OF BASES

Home is where the heart is. And where your command center is. And your factory. Besides being a spawn point, the command center allows you to change your class while in the field. Factories are self-explanatory. Protect both these important facilities with your life.

The dreaded strogg facilities remain shrouded in mystery since the artists haven't finished texturing their headquarters.

THE FRONT LINE

The average outdoor game map will be huge—roughly one square mile huge, if not bigger. The goal is to optimize the size and hit Cloud and Wedgwood's teamplay sweet spot: 24 to 32 players. "That's best for great teamplay while pursuing each mission's military objectives as part of an overriding campaign. That said, we will not hard-lock the player limit, and as with *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, we're sure people may choose to run larger servers (many ran 64-player counts) for a different player experience," says Wedgwood.

For the sake of our demo, I rode shotgun on sorties through the Canyon map and a work-in-progress temperate region. There's obviously more in store for the game's initial release: arctic warfare, desert and jungle fighting, even urban combat.

ACHTUNG, BABY

For a taste of what Splash Damage has wrought, check out this month's DVD! We've packed in the full game, *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*.

"Mavi! There's a hoggy on our six!" No prob, thanks to VTOL jets!

WHEN WORLDS

From playing *Quake 4*, we already know how the story ends. We take the fight to the strogg homeworld. How did it get so bad? *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* serves as a chronicle of the war's early years. Each of the 12 maps expected to ship with the game will in some small way tell a story. Think of each as a significant battle—like Pearl Harbor– or D-Day–themed missions in just about every World War II shooter. You'll even see nods to the future. In one mission, for example, you could be trying to raid a lab to stop the development of the hyperblaster. There will be multiple missions taking place on some maps at different times of day. The objectives of a night raid into a strogg camp will be very different from those of a daytime assault.

Enou[illegible]me to fight, Wedgwood launches the game and selects the Global Defense Force. The Canyon map is a very basic one, but its primary purpose is for play-balancing. The objective: The GDF needs to destroy an underground structure the strogg have captured. To do this, the humans need to construct a bridge. Next, they need to escort and deploy a mobile command center to the center of the level. After setting up field support (radar dishes, artillery, and the like), they need to press the attack. This particular map is broken up into four territories, by objectives, and when looking at an overview map, players will clearly be able to see which parts belong to your team and where you're needed most.

THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM, BUT THERE'S AN "M" AND "E"

One overriding theme in the battlefield makes *Enemy Territory* stand apart even from *Battlefield 2*: Cooperative teamwork is more important than simply following orders. How that is executed in-game is what makes things interesting.

Now, in a multiplayer shooter like *BF2*, the commander calls all the shots. Whether it's directing people, requesting an AWAC for radar, or calling in air strikes, he's the boss. In *Enemy Territory*, everybody plays a role. Sure, players can operate on their own, but it serves everyone best to meet the team's goals. In fact, throughout our conversation Wedgwood continually refers to the roles that need to be

The transforming strogg Goliath tank is one of Wedgwood's favorite vehicles. Check out its transformation from concept art to in-game menace.

COLLIDE

filled: offense, midfield, and defense. No, he's not referring to "proper" football (which he never really watches); he's basing this upon his experiences playing lots of *Quake: Team Fortress*.

Take the engineer setting up base defenses. Besides being able to repair vehicles and place mines, he can call in a radar dish. Pulling out his trusty deployment tool, he surveys the area. Then, as in any RTS, a grid shows you where you can deploy a unit. Upon calling in the request, a cargo chopper is sent out from the factory and air-drops the radar at the designated location. The radar then animates, opens up, and is ready for action.

But this is no RTS. There are no resources to sweat, save having to wait some time before you can call in another missile launcher or vehicle. After all, you don't want to have 10 Titan-claps three-person tanks come rumbling into the strogg base in the first five minutes of play. In fact, Wedgwood is almost obsessive about making sure this game is properly balanced. A QA team is already hammering the game around the clock to make certain there's a rock-paper-scissors balance in effect. "There will be advantages to being on foot," he says in an effort to assure that this won't turn into a vehicle contest. Wedgwood has also cautioned that nothing is set in stone at this point: "There are more units in development for both teams, and some existing ones may still be cut."

DRIVE OFFENSIVELY

Teamwork is especially important when you hit the road, and passengers will do a whole lot more than just ride shotgun. In most games, one person mans the turret while another player simply drives. Here, there's more thought being put into it from the start. Let's take the Badger (what Schwarzenegger's Hummer will probably look like in 50 years). If you hop in by yourself, you steer and have limited >

» COOPERATIVE TEAMWORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SIMPLY FOLLOWING ORDERS.

INTEL

CLASS: Field ops
ROLE: Fire support
GEAR: N5 machine pistol, ammo packs
ABILITY: Can call in the big guns (deployables like the field gun artillery, rocket artillery, strategic strike missile, and air-strike uplink); can designate enemy targets for destruction—as long as they're within range.

CLASS: Engineer
ROLE: Support, defense
GEAR: N22 shotgun, hand mines, proximity traps
ABILITY: Can construct and repair vehicles and objectives, and can also deploy turrets and defensive barriers.

CLASS: Soldier
ROLE: General assault
GEAR: N35 general-purpose machine gun (GPMG), N72 LAW rocket
ABILITY: Can convert N35 and N72 to be mounted and made capable for others.

CLASS: Medic
ROLE: Support
GEAR: N60 assault rifle (configured for use with a scope or grenade launcher attachment)
ABILITY: Can heal and revive teammates by dispensing health packs and using the defibrillator; can also construct supply stations.

CLASS: Ranger
ROLE: Stealth, recon
GEAR: N35 sniper rifle, smoke grenades
ABILITY: The GDF's covert operatives can use their PDAs to hack and disable enemy deployables.

GDF DEBRIEFING

"In all fairness to the strogg," says Wedgwood, "we do a pretty good job on ourselves in the next few years." By the time the aliens arrive, the world is already in full-on crisis mode. Global terrorism and worldwide strife lead to the creation of a paramilitary task force, the Global Defense Force (GDF). This rapid-response team is the only group with the equipment, command structure, and mobility to hold off the strogg. If the GDF looks vaguely familiar, it's because all of its gear is a futuristic glance at weapons and vehicles used today.

ENEMY RECON

KNOW THY ENEMY

How do you balance conventional human forces with an alien race that doesn't play by the same rules? Some vehicles and classes may behave similarly or play the same relative roles in a fight, but they are very, very different. While it is still early, we've managed to recover some covert data regarding these invading hostile forces.

Here's what we do know: "The strogg are a barbaric race of alien cyborgs traveling the universe killing or capturing any living organism in their path while annihilating any form of civilization left in their wake," says Wedgwood.

They are looking to harvest us for a material they call stroyent. This is their lifeblood: It fuels their vehicles, powers their weapons, and provides for their health. For example, midbattle a strogg warrior can reallocate energy so he has less ammo, but more health. Those not mulched outright are stroggified, stripped of their identity and forced to obey the supreme strogg, the Makron.

CLASS: **Tank (tentative)**
ROLE: **General assault**
GEAR: **Hyperblaster fast-firing assault weapon, Obliterator Exosonic Orb weapon**
ABILITY: **Can perform limited scouting and support functions via a remote-controlled drone.**

CLASS: **Oppressor**
ROLE: **Fire support**
GEAR: **Lightning pistol**
ABILITY: **Can control artillery deployables, such as the plasma mortar, rail howitzer, and orbital attacks, and can direct their fire against an adjacent enemy territory.**

CLASS: **Infiltrator**
ROLE: **Stealth, recon**
GEAR: **Rail gun, bioelectric pinch bomb**
ABILITY: **After subduing a target, the infiltrator can attempt to "stroggify" the fallen GDF soldier. In that instance, the infiltrator transfers its essence into the captured body; from there it can sneak behind enemy lines. The only way to identify stroggified soldiers is to look for small details like slight cybernetics or battle wounds.**

CLASS: **Constructor**
ROLE: **Support, defense**
GEAR: **Nail gun, EMP charge**
ABILITY: **Can construct and repair vehicles and objective points; can deploy units such as the psi-blade and deploy antipersonnel and antivehicle turrets. A tiny sentient A.I.-controlled repair drone repairs vehicles, but the two are symbiotically linked. If a constructor moves too far from its charge, the robot powers down.**

CLASS: **Meditek**
ROLE: **Support**
GEAR: **Unknown**
ABILITY: **If no medic is nearby, defend fallen friends from the strogg meditek, which can very quickly turn the tide of any battle. It can siphon stroyent from you and distribute it to other strogg to resupply health and ammo. It can also drop stroyent packs in the field. The more devious application is that once the meditek gets its claws on any fallen GDF, it becomes a spawn host for the next strogg waiting to come back to life.**

The Trojan amphibious assault vehicle is good for transporting as well as hitting the water

field-of-view control of the game. Player two takes the turret, giving him a full 360-degree shot at stroggs. Player three, sitting in the passenger seat, has a command console that allows him to designate targets and make it easier for everyone to focus their aim. "The vehicles in this game aren't meant to feel like buses," says Cloud. "They are an extension of your character." Wedgwood, of course, quickly points out that these vehicles are not final and a lot of tinkering will still be done.

However, there are many advantages to building near-futuristic vehicles. Namely, you can make an attack chopper that won't turn upside down and crash after takeoff (you can thank them later, Ryan). Since you shouldn't be punished just for getting off the ground, you'll find an intelligent learning curve built into vehicles. Once hitting a certain altitude, you get more control over the Anansi attack chopper. Angle of descent and speed will allow you to make strafing runs and pull off stunts, but if you stop your forward movement and descend, you can easily land. With VTOL rockets and helicopter rotors, it's a fairly nimble craft that, by Wedgwood's logic, is easy to learn but difficult to master.

GET PEOPLE IN THE GAME QUICKLY AND DON'T PUNISH THEM FOR BEING NEWBIES

AN ARMY OF ONES

That's the motto of the game, really: The team wants to get people in quickly and not punish them for being newbies. Many games offer an offline mode to teach the ropes or, at the very least, the ability to add bots. Not here—both go against the entire teamplay philosophy at Splash Damage. They considered devoting time to bots in the past, but with such a small squad of developers, they want to focus on maps and balancing, not teaching bots how to play every class and role. So how do you teach those lessons to newcomers? Give them some in-the-field training with solo missions.

"The whole point of the solo mission," says Wedgwood, "is to teach people how to play the game and help them contribute to the

team while doing it." Let's say your ranger is scouting ahead and places a radar. An enemy cannon is located. The game server identifies targets of opportunity, and the nearest soldier with the means to destroy it will see a minimission pop up in the corner of his HUD. Upon accepting it, the player's given a new objective and a waypoint appears leading him to the last known location of his target. Of course, once the means of spotting enemy forces is gone (if, say, a radar dish gets blasted), the player just has to do a little more recon work. Similarly, a paramedic in the field gets alerted to nearby fallen comrades.

Alternatively, your fire-team leader can issue basic context-sensitive commands. Move your crosshair over a fallen comrade and hit a button—you're requesting someone to revive him. Look at an enemy position, and hitting that same button will tell allies to take that target.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Through completing objectives or performing above and beyond the call of duty, you gain experience. And, as senior game designer Ed Stern jokes, "Experience is rewarded with more complexity." For instance, as you perform more cunning stunts during the course of battle, you gain the ability to perform even more intricate maneuvers in vehicles. The team is still toying with how to implement the reward system, be it additional skills or items, but one thing they want to avoid is what winds up happening in games like *Battlefield 2*. Uber-pL4y3r has been playing *BF2* since launch, is a top scorer on the ranking system, and has unlocked all these extra weapons. What chance does some first timer have against him? Little to none.

Yes, Splash Damage wants some sort of achievement-based ranking system, so you can see where you stand with your team members in the rankings, but the idea of persistent experience can be a problem. It's solution: the experience gained is limited to the campaign played. A typical campaign will consist of three maps. Any experience earned then will let you level up over the course of the fight, but once you start over, you reset the clock and you're once again playing on a level field.

ANIMATIONS

Thank artist Frankie Hobbins, who got all trussed up in a Lycra motion-capture suit; because of him you'll see some incredible animations throughout *ETQW*. There are different stances, and the physical demeanors of the two species just look different. You can spot it from a distance: GDF forces use proper combat stances, while the strogg swagger in menacingly like the Terminator. Even more important is that you can see what characters are doing. For those who look carefully, the game conveys lots of information. Soldiers reach for weapons and swap gear on their outfits, and you can see in third person if someone is reloading.

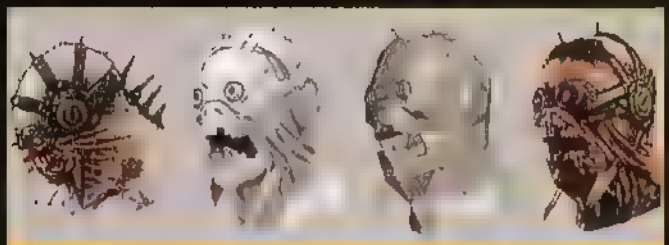
HIGH TECH

Talk nerdy to me

Wedgwood submits, "It's amazing being able to get help from the likes of [id Software's] John Carmack and Robert Duffy," but Cloud gives much of the credit back to the Splash Damage team. "They are being way too humble about what's being done in-house," he adds, "They have some amazingly talented people working on this game." In fact, when Carmack heard what Splash Damage was hoping to accomplish (everything you see below, plus being able to optimize network code for 24 to 32 players online), he reportedly said, "That's impossible!" Apparently, it's not.

PHYSICS

In this game, everything—be it a hovering deaconator strogg tank or the lumbering mobile command center—has unique properties. Try parking the mobile command center on too steep an angle and it'll roll downhill. You'll be able to shoot individual tires off vehicles. The environment itself reacts as well. Cars kick up gravel. River currents can carry debris downstream. At different key map points, you'll be able to get creative and create rockslides for makeshift roadblocks. Wedgwood gives an example of when a QA tester loaded a Husky ATV (it was just added to the game that morning) with C4 and rolled it down a hill into enemy territory. When the stroggs gathered to check it out—BOOM! Bodies were flying everywhere. Lesson learned: Everything's fair game.



MEGATEXTURES

This must be a big deal. Why else would they call it "mega"? Imagine if you could paint down a texture, and without any additional coding, it tells the game everything it needs to know about that surface—for example, that dirt behaves a certain way and has distinct physical properties (it'll slow down vehicles, sound a certain way when tires crunch on it, and create debris when shot). The payoff is that you can create a less-detailed model and paint it with a more-detailed texture. This means that huge maps won't bring your PC to a screeching halt.

POSTPROCESSING

Who needs HDR? It makes for a really pretty light show, but damn, those effects become a major resource hog.

Splash Damage's technology allows it to get HDR-like results at a lower CPU cost than real HDR. Realistic sunlight and reflections are all here, and the tint, contrast, saturation, and bloom effects are all controllable. The bonus is that the developers can use this engine to change the mood of the game—maybe desaturate the light for some rainy day blues. Stacking more effects on that tech allows for other very cool postprocessing effects in-game. Try zooming in. For the GDF, you'll see lens distortion around a scope's edges. The strogg have a video feed that slightly pixelates when you move.

DETAILS

An amazing amount of thought is going into the game world. The characters themselves convey information even when you aren't. You can tell which class each character is without having an icon hovering over him. If that engineer is out of mines, you see an empty spot on his pack. Is the strogg medtek a quart low on stroyent? You can see the juice sloshing around in his backpack. Then you need to look at the environment. A scaling level-of-detail shader, affectionately called the Stuff System, populates the area with objects in an area of relevance. Close up you'll see buildings or debris, and at a distance the amount of texture detail gradually fades. But even from high up, you'll see newspapers littering a street.

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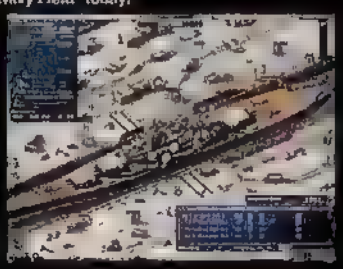

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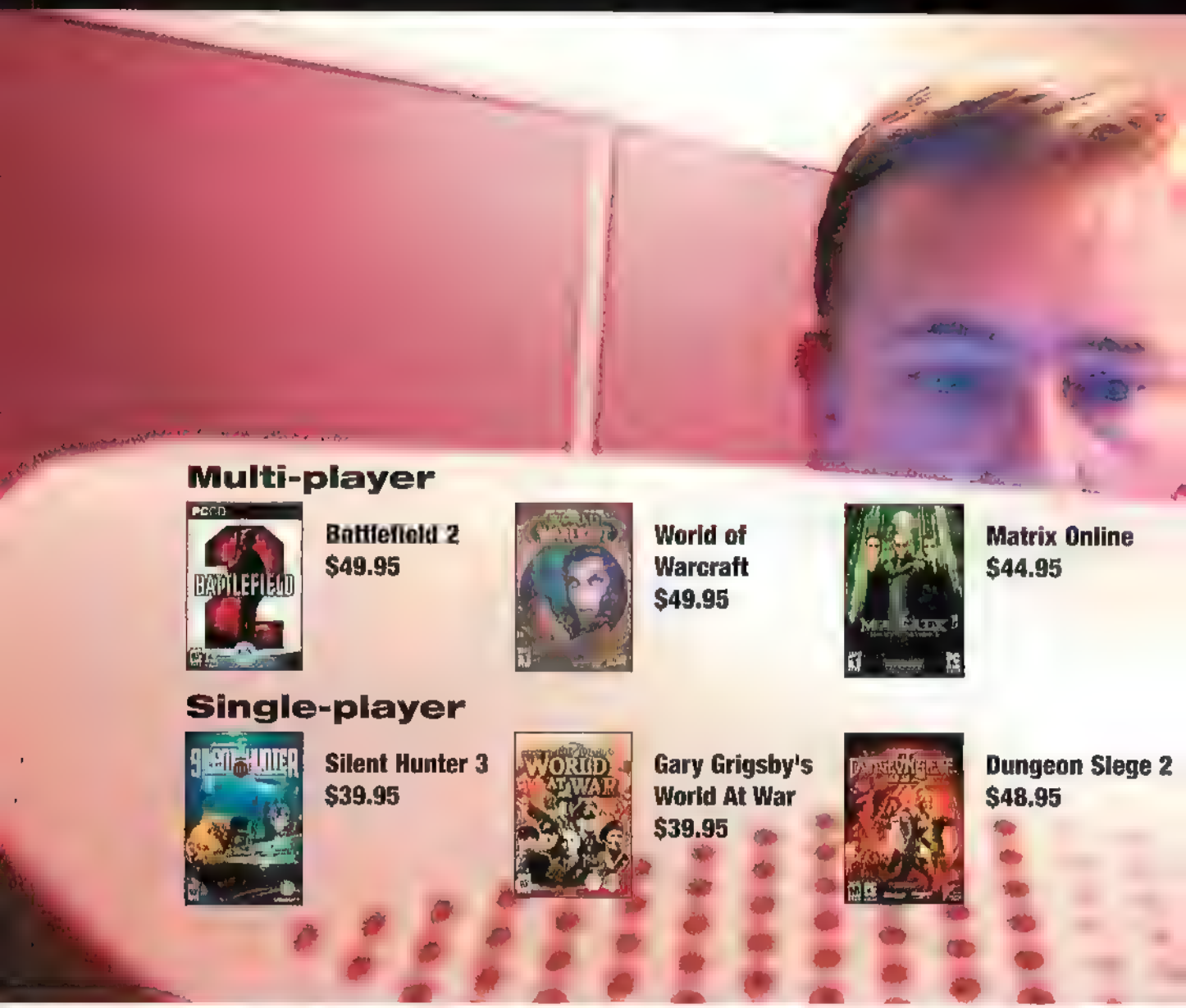

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REVIEWS

OPINIONS YOU CAN TRUST

96

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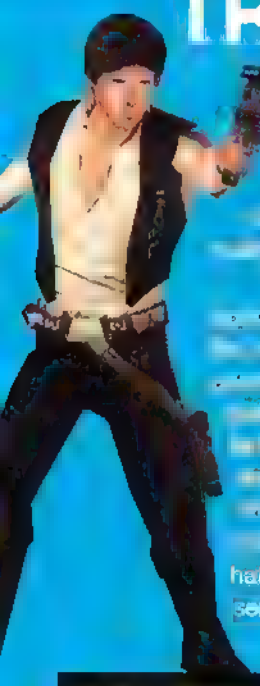


You should be—because this month's Reviews section is all about the big bang, baby! *Call of*

hating on us later if our choices don't match yours—we're sensitive and it makes us cry. >>

REVIEW STANDARDS

Our review policy is simple: We review only final, gold, released-to-retail code, no betas or "near-final, reviewable" builds. We don't review patches, with the notable exception of those for online games like MMOs that autoupdate as a standard part of their operation. We do this so we are reviewing exactly what you, the consumer, are buying.

All games are rated on a simple five-star scale. One-star games are utter garbage, three-star games should appeal to die-hard fans of the genre, and the rare five-star game is an instant classic. Only the best games—receiving four and a half stars or better—are awarded an Editors' Choice.

INSIDE

Civilization IV
Say good-bye to your social life.

The Movies
Coming soon: *CGW—The Movie.*

Rag Doll Kung Fu
Time for an ass-whuppin'!

▲ The refined leader personalities make you feel as though you're interacting with fleshed-out characters instead of simple strategy opponents. Here, Saladin of Arabia contemplates the prospect of letting me pay for all with Barry Manilow albums.

▲ The foreign advisor screen seems to indicate that everybody hates me. Starting that nuclear war might have had something to do with it.

CIVILIZAT

In the beginning...

PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games GENRE: Strategy ESRB RATING: E10+ RECOMMENDED: 1.2GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 1.7GB hard drive space

"...THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND void." So says Leonard "Mr. Spock" Nimoy in his quintessentially emotionless narration in *Civilization IV* each time you start a new game. And then the map generator finishes filling in that void—and you take your first steps into an ancient world that threatens to leave you sleep deprived for days. *Civilization*—the brainchild of legendary game designer Sid Meier—has stood, for 14 years now, as one of the best and most addictive turn-based strategy series ever to grace a PC screen. Trying to improve such a venerable series is a tall order, but *Civ 4* brings a host of top-notch additions to the fore. From the Stone Age to the Space Age, you now get a lot more options to help you build your empire. So, yes, Firaxis has done it again.

Civ 3 junkies should quickly key in on the overhauled government system, which now gets divided into five civic subcategories. These civic mechanics allow for a mind-boggling matrix of possibilities in regard to how you run your kingdom, which include adopting slavery, allowing a free-market economy, or enforcing a state religion. Although the new religious system feels overemphasized at times, it adds some great facets to gameplay, ranging from gathering information via espionage undertaken by spies to using fierce troops who zealously fight to defend holy shrines.

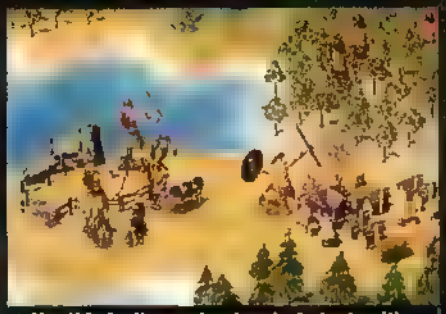
And therein lies the crown jewel of *Civ 4*: the new combat mechanics. Instead of providing straight attack/defense values for your units, the game relies on a deeper RPG-style experience system. Your units can specialize and improve in all sorts of tasks as they level up, such as the amount of collateral damage they inflict and bonuses they receive when fighting in specific environmental conditions. This system conveys a real sense of attachment to your units; you'll definitely feel a tug at the heartstrings when you lose your favorite swordsman unit that had become especially adept at raiding cities, or your marines who spent countless battles training to become the best veteran jungle fighters in the world.

» THEREIN LIES THE CROWN JEWEL OF *CIV 4*: THE NEW COMBAT MECHANICS.

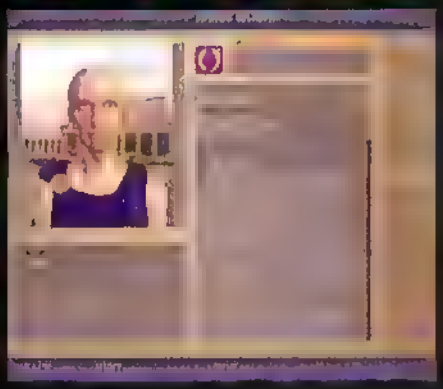
WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

All of these civic and strategic enhancements are clinched together by a brand-new layered 3D world environment. Where in previous *Civ* games, each tile on the map contained only one specific category of terrain, the various topography types in *Civ 4* can overlap: You'll find forested hills in the plains, loamy grassland valleys, and numerous combinations in between. The map generator uses a more tightly variegated mix of tiles, which initially feels inferior to *Civ 3*'s more geologically accurate map output, but ends up working very well with the new terrain overlapping physics in terms of balance. As an added visual touch, you can now zoom out to view the world map as an actual globe—provided your civilization possesses the technological aptitude to understand that the Earth is round.

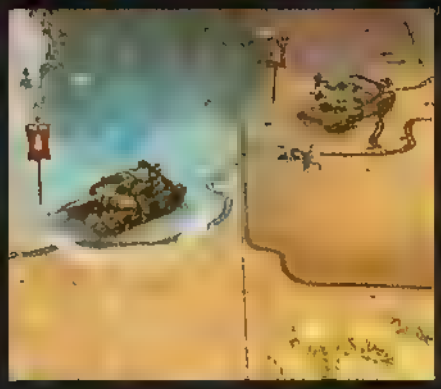
A lot of other staple *Civ* features find themselves simplified...for better or worse. Resistance against a hostile invasion now just shuts down a city the



▲ No, this isn't a raging band of giants—it's just how *Civilization IV* handles unit scale.



▲ The Civilopedia doesn't skimp on information.



▲ The blue aura means promotion time!

▲ Sid Meier himself narrates the tutorial.

ION IV

▲ As always, constructing a great wonder brings you huge gameplay bonuses.

way that civil disorder used to in *Civ 3*, and unhappy citizens become deadbeats who up and refuse to work. Oddly, you can actually just ignore both of these situations without any serious economic setbacks. *Civ 3*'s unpopular mechanics for governmental corruption and waste get replaced with an upkeep fee, and a city's numeric health rating thankfully eliminates the need to manually deal with pollution.

The rationale behind most of these simplifications revolves around alleviating tedium and lessening the overall barrier to entry, but for every minor *Civ 3* quirk that the game addresses, a new and equally minor quirk manifests itself. *Civ 4* isn't necessarily a better (or worse) game than its predecessor—it's just different. Whether you favor one over the other boils down to a simple case of personal preference.

TECH SUPPORT

A few of *Civ 4*'s quirks might be a little harder to swallow. The option to abandon an unwanted city no longer exists, and the logic behind the tech tree seems less salient and more arbitrary—although this doesn't detract too much from the gameplay. A few technical oversights also sour the experience; gamers with ATI videocards should prepare for some stability issues and occasional crashes. *Civ 4* fatally responds to Alt-Tabs, too, which gets frustrating when you need to multitask or take a break. Oh, and your eyes aren't playing tricks on you: In some boxed copies, the install disc is the one you need to play the game—not the erroneously labeled play disc. Hopefully, these gaffes have been corrected by the time you read this.

Like a good game of chess, *Civ 4* teaches you a thing or two about strategy, but also so much more. It acts as a wonderful history lesson, and the wealth of information in the game's comprehensive Civilopedia makes learning fun. If you harbor any interest in strategy games and want something with more depth than the average mindless RTS, you would do well to immerse yourself in *Civilization IV* and let it soak in. It might steal away hours of your time, but it's one of the rare games that can genuinely enrich your life while doing so. / **Matthew Chase**

OPEN BORDERS

A great update to a classic PC game.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

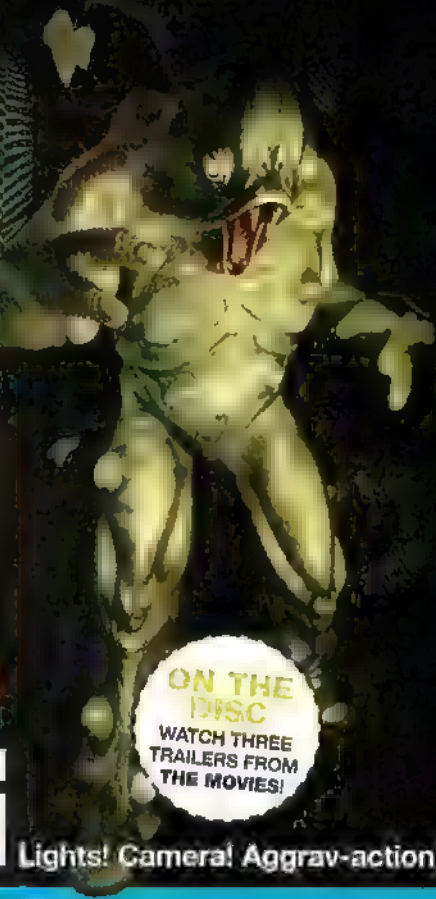
VERDICT ★★★★½

▲ Why are all my leading ladies drinking? Because each endured three rounds of plastic surgery before I'd even consider casting her.

▲ Subtitles and audio are easily added in postproduction.

▲ Nice overhead view—but it would be nicer if it were more functional.

▲ Dolores! You didn't need to bring dessert!



ON THE DISC
WATCH THREE TRAILERS FROM THE MOVIES!

THE MOVIES

Lights! Camera! Aggrav-action!

WE ALL HAVE THAT SUPERNERDY friend who can rant forever about all the inconsistencies and blasphemy in the *Lord of the Rings* movies. Why is he so well informed? Because he spends all day watching the extended editions while wearing a Frodo costume and a special collector's edition replica ring. All that he masks a deep affection—so think of me as that guy as I pick at *The Movies* like it's a week-old scab. I'll say it loud and clear: *The Movies* is one of the most addictive and enjoyable games you'll play this year, full of stuff to do and packed full of rewards as you live out your Tinseltown fantasy.

But it could have been so much better.

THE GREAT DICTATOR

The premise: You take the reigns of a classic Hollywood studio, guiding it from the genesis of the movie industry to the present day. You get two modes—a pure sandbox mode and a story mode that doles out rewards for accomplishments like creating powerful stars and laying out your studio well. It's pretty hard not to enjoy the steady stream of new sets, costumes, and talent.

But it's almost too much—as great as it is to zoom in and ogle the action, the constant demands of your studio and stars frequently play out as simple harassment. This game deserves to be savored, yet you find yourself constantly hounded to create more staff, handle your stars' needs and *Sims*-style relationships, maintain your buildings, and more. The game desperately needs an option to let you play at a slower pace.

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

It could also use a more realistic staffing engine. When you have $5 million in the bank, you shouldn't be prevented from shooting a movie due to a lack of extras—but *The Movies* walks that exact line of logic. Ridiculous, considering you can get real-life extras to work for tuna sandwiches. But all manpower is finite here, right down to the janitors and handymen—of which you rarely have enough. If you have the money, shouldn't you be able to hire as you please?

The tools come up somewhat lacking, too. So much goes on at any given time that it really calls to attention the lack of meaningful filters. Why can't I separate actors from directors? Why isn't there a hotkey to cycle through the talent? Why can't I access the build menu from the overhead map? Why can't I see a star's abilities on the salary screen? Why can't I queue up build orders while the game is paused? Why can't I divide the bazillion costumes in a way that doesn't force me to click through each one to find what I want?

I've got about three notebook pages full of niggles and annoyances, including one bug that irrevocably stops production on a movie, though your money continues to drain. But every bitter little jot on those pages is a love letter in disguise, a glowing compliment just dying to be given. I'm just hoping for a patch or expansion to help make *The Movies* love me back—because in spite of its flaws, I can't get enough of it. / **Robert Coffey**

Won't win an Oscar—but it deserves a nomination.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★★☆

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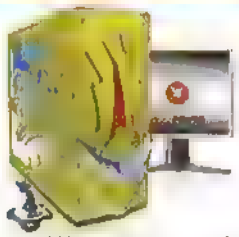

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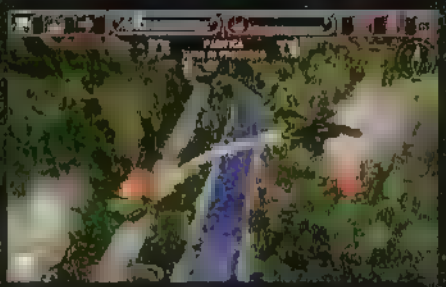
Divided we fall: The former United States is factionalized into seven independent territories.



Kaboom! Aerial units reign supreme over many of the lightly armored ground forces.

SHATTERED UNION

A different kind of Civil War reenactment

[illegible] connection MULTIPLAYER Internet, LAN (2 players)

WHAT WOULD A MODERN-DAY CIVIL War look like? *Shattered Union* offers one potential scenario: a war-torn United States splintered into seven factionalized territories, which find themselves at odds in the wake of nuclear disaster and severe political turmoil. This alternate history setting entertains...as long as you can stomach the fact that it comes packaged as a hex-based war game.

Not that I have anything against hex maps—in fact, I found *Shattered Union* to be quite accessible, unlike many of the hardcore historical simulators that get churned out by publishers like Battlefront.com and Matrix Games. The streamlined gameplay works well: After choosing your faction (go California Commonwealth!), you can attack adjacent regions on the U.S. map, deploying various infantry, armored vehicles, and air support to your chosen battlefield. Each unit may move and fire at nearby targets once per turn; combat resolves by way of quick back-and-forth firefights where terrain, unit statistics, and an underlying rock-paper-scissors dynamic determine the outcome. It's simple, functional, and devoid of overabundant minutiae.

The primary goal as you trade blows with CPU-controlled territories revolves around capturing control points scattered throughout the field. Once you conquer a particular region of the former United States, it falls in line with your growing empire, giving you an increased cash flow and a better political reputation—provided you don't cause too much collateral damage in the process. You'll actually spend quite a bit of time defending your own territory since the competing territories have their own domination plans...which makes the scattershot A.I. a little unfortunate, as the CPU tends to make some boneheaded tactical decisions. But that's what multiplayer exists for, and *Shattered Union* gives you the opportunity to strategize against a friend via online or hotseat play. Stalwart armchair generals may look at it as "war-gaming lite," but for the rest of us, *Shattered Union* makes the genre a little more approachable. / **Ryan Scott**

A war game for casual gamers.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD | VERDICT ★★★½☆

NHL EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER 2005

Back in the manager's chair

PUBLISHER Sega DEVELOPER Sports Interactive GENRE Management sim ESRB RATING [illegible] REQUIRED 233MHz CPU, 96MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED None MULTIPLAYER Internet, LAN (2 players)

The new tactical view gives budding GMs a better way to control the action.

LAST YEAR'S HIGHLY DETAILED HOCKEY management sim gets some new polish, just in time for the resurrection of the NHL. With a roster full of upgrades, enhancements, and new features, *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager 2005* turns your quest for Lord Stanley's Cup into another addiction.

Instead of featuring conventional on-the-ice action, *EHM* finds you running a professional hockey franchise from the ground up, using real NHL details and statistics (updated for the 2005-2006 season). As the general manager, you must form suitable strategies for team marketing, player acquisitions, roster management, and in-game tactics—all in the name of making your team a winning one. Building a victorious franchise can be unnerving at times—*EHM* has no shortage of options to choose from, and with just a slight slip, the board of directors may hand you your walking papers.

FLYERS FANATIC REBORN

The most important update here: expanded team control. Since real-life team managers always have their eyes peeled for hot young prospects, scouting plays a more prominent role in this year's game. Assigning scouts to search for talent from other teams and worldwide leagues increases your options for putting together your own winning club. Knowing the scoop on high-profile players and up-and-coming studs facilitates making advantageous roster changes, and the upgraded database of player statistical analysis handily assists you in the decision-making process by offering a clearer picture of player performance. The new bio screens also offer plenty of details on individual players' performances. In addition, new tactical options allow the general manager to form strategies based on several different styles of play, which really helped my Flyers' big attackers outman the smaller Lightning defenders inside the crease for an easy victory.

Don't be fooled by the meager system requirements—*NHL Eastside Hockey Manager 2005* offers amazing depth of play for even the most discriminating hockey fans. / **Raphael Liberatore**

A good tune-up for hockey fanatics.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD | VERDICT ★★★★☆

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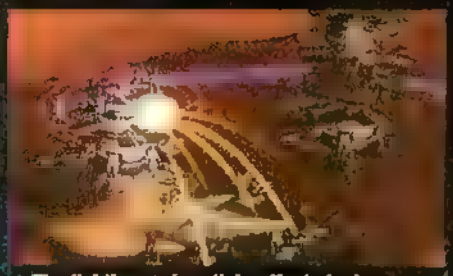
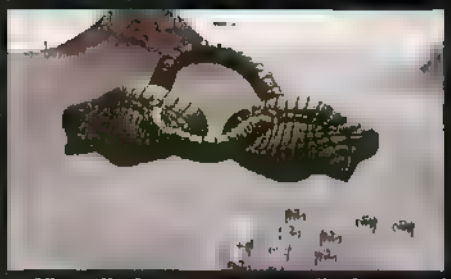
EARTH 2160

2,160 ways not to excite you



▲ The lighting and particle effects look amazing—without strangling midrange systems.



▲ Alien missile sans resource gathering: one cool idea in a sea of blah.

***EARTH 2160* WANTS TO BE LOVED.** It has those pixel-shaded puppy-dog eyes, that sexy "festooned with futuristic research technologies" strut, and with four warring interstellar factions, it might as well be crowing, "Eat this, *StarCraft*." It would be unjustified doing so, however, because it frankly exemplifies how to overdo just about everything. Like its stackable Tinkertoy-esque bases, *Earth 2160* presents a chaotic caboodle of ideas slapped onto a cheesy bore of a story.

Did you miss *Earth 2140* and *2150*? Crib notes: Earth goes bye-bye, and mankind goes wee-wee-wee all the way to Mars—where, 10 years later, everyone fights for primo real estate. *2160* looks like it got dipped in copper and polished with Brasso, thanks be to Pixel Shader 3.0 support. That's the good.

The bad: *2160*'s four campaigns (one for each faction) are rainy-day dull. Walk the hero, nurse the base (on water, metal, or silicon), defend some crash survivors, whack the alien invaders...we've done it how many times now? Couple this with dreary stretches during which you rush enemy bases, whittle down their defenses, run out of soldier fodder, and repeat a dozen times. Emphasis on the "whittle"—attacking key structures works about as effectively as carving marble with a pocketknife.

These trends might be best summed up as feature creep. Customize units, research a zillion howzits and whatzits that each nudge you forward millimeters, then spend hours positioned outside enemy bases, lobbing missiles and checking your watch. Skirmish online and things gets a teensy bit more exciting...or try out the generically named aliens faction, which relies on self-replication in lieu of traditional resource gathering—a healthy thumb in a mess of sore ones. If an *Earth 2170* ever surfaces, hopefully developer Reality Pump wakes up and smells the humdrum. / **Matt Peckham**

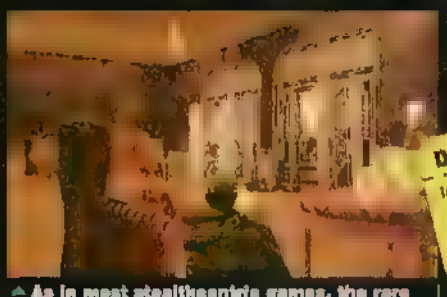
***StarCraft*, sans that pesky "fun" thing.**

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★½☆☆

SNIPER ELITE

One shot, one kill

▲ A sniper's dream city.



▲ As in most stealth-centric games, the rare close-quarters fight usually leaves you bloody and battered.

DI "D-DAY" LUO

In the past three years, former CGW intern Di Luo has reviewed more games than any writer on staff

***SNIPER ELITE* CONTAINS ALL THE** elements of a bad FPS or spy novel: a hokey title, a silly story, and an elite operative facing desperate odds behind enemy lines. Surprisingly, developer Rebellion squeezes in enough gameplay twists to make this budget FPS an enjoyable break from the norm. Though set in WWII, *Elite* features none of the pretensions of authenticity found in other period games. Instead of playing a grunt, you're an OSS operative sent into Berlin to snatch nuclear secrets from both Nazi and Soviet hands. Extensive silliness abounds: Soviet troops with German hardware, MG42s being used like submachine guns, and heavy tanks vulnerable to a single rifle shot.

If you can ignore the ridiculous stuff, you get a decent FPS that mixes traditional shooter bits with the stealth elements of games like *Thief*. As a sniper, you slink around in the shadows, either ambushing or avoiding enemy patrols. The intricacies of *Elite*'s sniping elements demand patience and care, as the game takes factors such as gravity, wind, and heart rate into account. The game scores you on accuracy—and you even get rewarded with some cool "bullet time" movie sequences when you make difficult shots.

The better of *Elite*'s 26 missions allow for several solutions and involve myriad covert elements; for example, you can throw rocks to distract patrols and set trip-wire grenade traps to punish unsuspecting foes. A few frustrating areas necessitate repeated reloads, but at least you have unlimited saves at your disposal. One other big disappointment is the absence of a co-op multiplayer mode, which got cut from the PC version. Still, if you need a break from the usual run and gun, *Sniper Elite*'s twist on the traditional WWII shooter makes it a fun choice. / **Di Luo**

A surprisingly decent stealth shooter.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★½☆

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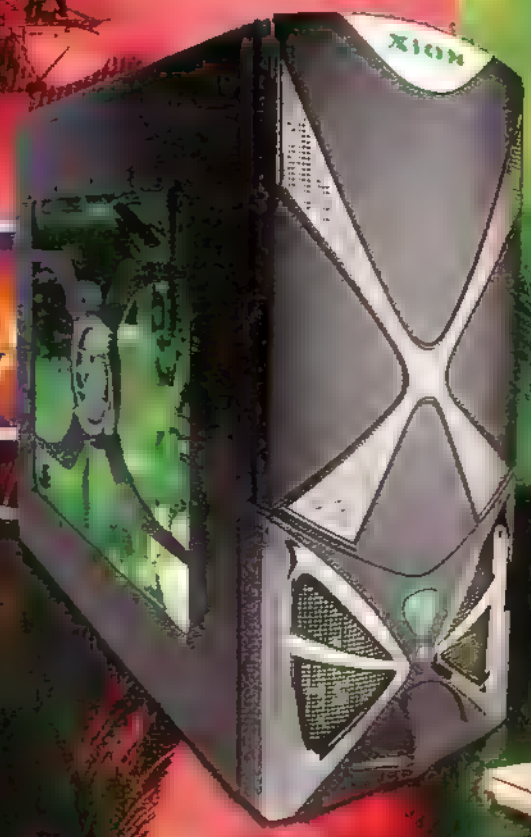

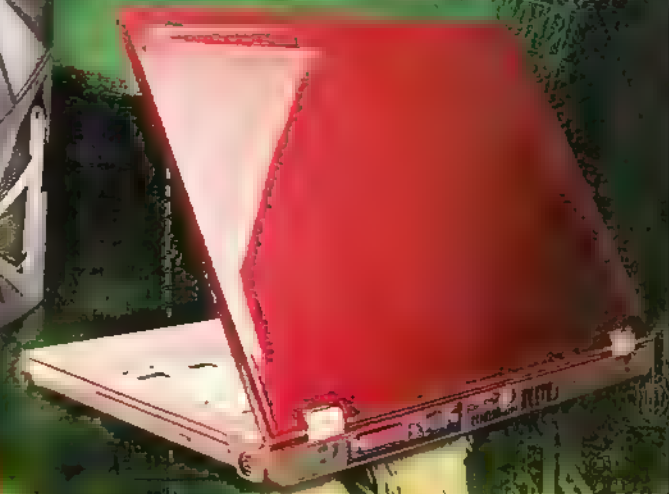

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▲ The new space combat mode puts you in the pilot's seat of numerous classic *Star Wars* vehicles.

▲ I thought this one would be a cinch, but apparently they waterproofed the damned battle droids.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

We sense something—a presence we've not felt since...

PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Pandemic GENRE: Shooter ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: 1.6GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 4.5GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: Broadband Internet connection, gamepad MULTIPLAYER: Internet, LAN (2-64 players)

GEORGE LUCAS SUCKS. THE GUY writes three of the worst scripts ever, completely destroys my favorite childhood mythos, and makes me swear that I won't get fooled again. And then his company releases *Star Wars Battlefront II*...and damn if I don't start whistling "The Imperial March" all over again.

STAY ON TARGET

Unlike the prequel trilogy, *Battlefront II* improves upon its predecessor in virtually every way. Not only does it sport slicker graphics, improved bot A.I., and larger player limits, but it also brings home more new features than Cher after a visit to the plastic surgeon. First among these: the film-inspired single-player campaign, which follows *Star Wars* Episodes II through VI from the perspective of a clone soldier. Want the stormtrooper's-eye view of Princess Leia's capture above Tatooine? How about flying a TIE bomber to take down General Grievous' flagship? *Battlefront II* has you covered. And if you earn enough points (for accomplishing mission objectives or just good ol' killin'), you can even take control of legendary *Star Wars* luminaries like Han Solo or Darth Maul.

And yes, I did just say "flying a TIE bomber." *Battlefront II*'s fully fledged space combat mode might be the coolest new addition—though you may want to pick up a quality joystick or gamepad to get the most out of it. We're talking dozens of TIEs, X-wings, and other classic *Star Wars* spacecraft whizzing in and out among massive star destroyers and Corellian Corvettes; beam cannons illuminating the inky vacuum of space; and fevered cries of "I can't shake him!" issued from your wussy-ass wingmen. It may be a sad commentary, but *Battlefront II* stands as one of this year's best PC space sims...and it's an FPS.

EXECUTE ORDER 66!

And a damned good FPS, at that. The Force is strong here, supporting up to 64 players in a variety of game modes including capture the flag, conquest (think *Battlefield 1942*), the aforementioned space combat mode, and a revamped Galactic Conquest mode that overlays a board game–like strategic element onto the action. Even the modes rehashed from the first *Battlefront* come packed with bantha-loads of new weapons, classes, and vehicles.

The dark side rears its ugly head in only a few minor technical areas: Some of the maps, particularly the lush Yavin 4 and Felucia, suffer from heavy lag, and the game occasionally locks up or crashes outright during bigger confrontations. But overall, as a thrice-burned *Star Wars* fan, I'm pleasantly surprised by this game's quality. Ironically, it debuted on the same day as the *Episode III* DVD; by comparison, *Battlefront II* makes you wish Mr. Lucas had let the game designers have a crack at his screenplays, too. / **Eric Neigher**

BATTLEFRONT II STANDS AS ONE OF THIS YEAR'S BEST PC SPACE SIMS...AND IT'S AN FPS.

ALWAYS TWO, THERE ARE

What's up with *Star Wars* and the number 2? Many fans recognize *The Empire Strikes Back* (the second film of the original trilogy) as the best in the series—but *Star Wars*–based games also seem to improve uncannily the second time around.

- *Battlefront* (3.5 stars, *CGW* #246) vs. *Battlefront II* (4 stars, *CGW* #255)
- *Dark Forces* (4 stars, *CGW* #130) vs. *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* (4.5 stars, *CGW* #151)
- *Rogue Squadron* (8/10, *EGM* #115) vs. *Rogue Squadron III: Rogue Leader* (9/10, *EGM* #149)
- *X-Wing* (predates *CGW*'s rating system) vs. *TIE Fighter* (5 stars, *CGW* #123)
- *Knights of the Old Republic* (5 stars, *CGW* #234) vs. *Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* (4.5 stars, *CGW* #250) (OK, so there's always one exception)

Surprisingly strong *Star Wars* combat.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★★½

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RP

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Above: A.I. lets your squad hurdle over low walls and the like.

CALL OF DUTY 2 DEMO AND TRAILER!

CALL OF

War is swell

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THE horrors of World War II would evolve into comfort food, the gaming equivalent of Mom's made-from-scratch mac 'n' cheese—a safe, predictable, and satisfying indulgence that might not challenge your senses but pleases them nonetheless? Not me, that's for sure. But *Call of Duty 2* offers the same gratifying predictability as homemade meatloaf on a rainy afternoon.

THE LATEST GOOD WAR

As with said meatloaf or mac 'n' cheese, everyone knows what the typical WWII shooter tastes like and what to expect. Sure enough, *COD2* hits all the obligatory notes—the clear the bunkers missions, the hold the line levels, the armor escort missions, the sniper levels, the clear out the village sorties, a few moments manning a tank, and so on. Most any war movie or WWII shooter cliché that you can think of shows up here, as big and as reliably exciting as the D-Day sequence of *Saving Private Ryan* (a day finally given the *Call of Duty* treatment, focusing on the role of the Army Rangers).

You'd expect that such conventions, so close to lapsing into overfamiliarity, might be destined to fail—but they succeed here precisely because of their familiarity, and because developer Infinity Ward delivers the goods at a consistently high level of quality. *COD2* comes equipped with some of the best graphics of the year: The character models and animations look terrific and lifelike, the weather effects add variety and texture to every mission, each level showcases a new and realistically bombed-out feast for the eyes, top-notch voice acting gives A.I. squadmates some much-appreciated personality, and the sound design brings the chaos of war to thundering life. Even the enemies—so commonly reduced to little more than interchangeable targets—exert a little more life here, often literally: Fatally wounded Germans frequently try to fire a few final shots from their weapons before you dispatch them once and for all.

SURE ENOUGH, *COD2* HITS ALL THE OBLIGATORY NOTES.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Like the first game, *COD2* features a trio of campaigns to play through: British, Russian, and American. Unlike its predecessor, though, you don't have to play through them in a set order; instead, campaigns unlock as you play, giving you some (limited) say in how you play through them. That (limited) say extends to the missions in the game as well—you'll frequently have several objectives to accomplish in a level, and the game leaves the completion order entirely up to you.

The CPU-controlled soldiers fighting at your side receive a beefy boost in their A.I., making

Character-model detail is outstanding.

Behold...the federally mandated sniper level.

Ambushed in Africa.

Armor tanks [illegible] that [illegible] flamethrower [illegible]

[illegible]xpert, *COD2* features more [illegible] signature vehicle twist.

The fashion-forward British army—so dashing in their shorts!

DUTY 2

them much more effective. They'll still constantly die all around you, encouraging you to take point and deliver most of the actual killing shots, since your allies excel primarily in providing cover.

But this help doesn't go unappreciated, because the enemies get their own A.I. upgrades, constantly flanking and pinning you down. As heavily scripted as these sorts of games tend to be, *COD2* feels more organic than most, thanks to the cunning of its foes—foes unafraid to fall back and take better defensive positions if the situation suggests it.

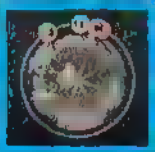
COVER ME

The ferociousness and smarts of the game's enemies encourage the heavy use of two of *COD2*'s new features: smoke grenades and cover. Cover is absolutely crucial, since the game consistently challenges you to negotiate wide-open killing zones, while the strategic use of smoke grenades often makes the difference between getting torn apart in crossfire and successfully advancing upon an enemy position. You'll frequently find yourself ducking for protection behind every tree stump, dead cow, and blasted jeep, as enemy defenses get so brutal that you have to leapfrog from rock to tractor to wall just to get close to them.

More important, the respite granted by proper cover also happens to be the only thing that heals damage. With no health power-ups whatsoever, the game keeps you alive by forcing you into sustained periods of health-replenishing safety. This admittedly radical conceit works fantastically by eliminating the need to manage medkits and making health recovery an actual part of the relentless action.

Everything in *Call of Duty 2* feels similarly polished and well thought out, including the solid if uninspired multiplayer mode. It all amounts to a brief—but entertaining—ride. Like a good meatloaf, it expertly scratches that comfort food itch, leaving you well-satisfied until the craving hits you again, months later—just in time for the inevitable expansion. / **Robert Coffey**

POINTS ON THE COMPASS



Just as good as—and a lot like—the first *Call of Duty*.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ★★★★☆

PLAY THE F.E.A.R. MULTIPLAYER DEMO!

F.E.A.R.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T

PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal Games DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions
GENRE: Shooter ESRB RATING: M REQUIRED: 1.7GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 8GB hard drive
Space RECOMMENDED: 3.5GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, DirectX 9.0–compatible videocard
MULTIPLAYER: Internet, LAN 2-16 players

THIS MUCH YOU KNOW: THE GHOST-busters of F.E.A.R.—First Encounter Assault and Recon—step in when the government's baloney department goes bad. So far, fine. It's when man-eating commander Paxton Fettel and his psychically controlled flunkies come into play that it gets really goofy. After that, it's every *X-Files* mystery imaginable—fluoridated water, pyrokinesis, poltergeists, and weird science. *F.E.A.R.*'s hooey isn't the problem; smart money never banks on Nebula-worthy narrative in a first-person shooter anyway. It's that the thriller's story is really no more than a blip of microprose stretched and stretched by hours and hours of rat-a-tat-tat.

Still, *F.E.A.R.* scares. The giggling, everywhere and nowhere at once; the naughty girl ripped right out of *The Ring* who crosses the ceiling and your thoughts with every creaking this or that; the fire and smoke where the walls once were—half of it's hallucinatory, and all the spookier because it happens anytime, anywhere. After that, though, recycled incidents reappear at intervals, and *F.E.A.R.* tires itself out with treadmill scare tactics. One bleeding wall is unnerving, two will upset the lily-livered—beyond that, it's business as usual. And yet, when you aren't spooked, when you quit wondering why what's happening is happening and you see that atmosphere here stops at "office park after-hours," *F.E.A.R.* is still one of the year's top single-player shooters.

SURREPTITIOUS SHOOTING

Slow-mo shoot-outs (shorthand for your faster-than-human reflexes) sound like more of the same, but the difference is in the details: the shower of sparks from ricocheting shots or the guy who crashes through a cabinet, sending boxes and bottles flying when a shotgun blast sweeps him off his feet. Every bullet is an opportunity: to pulverize plaster and splinter boards, to crack glass and gouge concrete in fat chunks. *F.E.A.R.*'s firefights are the best in the biz. Period.

Call the clock-tampering thing a crutch; *F.E.A.R.*'s troopers try so hard, you almost hate not fighting fair. For instance, they work together in teams to outflank you. They search for cover and overturn objects to create it when they can't find it. All of it is stuff we've seen other shooters claim credit for without really getting it right. Here, it means that someone fires wildly and falls back when he takes a flesh wound, that he relocates the second you stop looking, and that he understands that he's got a shotgun, you're reloading a rifle, and that it's in his interest to get in and close the gap. And that right there is enough to put *F.E.A.R.* in with the few FPS titles worth tackling a second or third time to see how the same parts play out with fresh tactics. / **Shawn Elliott**

F.E.A.R.'S TROOPERS TRY SO HARD, YOU ALMOST HATE NOT FIGHTING FAIR.

This is what we call "stopping power."

Don't expect any lazy A.I. here, kids.

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY

F.E.A.R. works better with the competi-

detects medium settings on a GeForce 7800 GTX–powered PC, while autodetecting maximum settings on another machine with the same specs and ATI's older Radeon 9800 XT. No word yet from Monolith, as of this writing, on whether we can expect a patch.

FEAR YOUR FRIENDS

Here's why *F.E.A.R.*'s multiplayer modes matter: the same reduce-it-to-rubble gameplay and that better-than-bullet-time slow-mo. Where slow-mo is concerned, it's a matter of either one side activating it at the others expense in team-on-team matches, or a lone gunman fending off the group with the reflex-padding power up until someone swipes it from him. Otherwise, the online stuff here is exactly what you'd expect: competitive firefights in the familiar deathmatch and CTF flavors. Unfortunately, the spawn system is broken, as dudes often reappear in specific spots after dying. In other words, blast away—the fish are already in the barrel.

Not so spooky, oh so super.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ★★★★☆

PRINCE OF PERSIA
THE TWO THRONES

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KEYWORD: PRINCE

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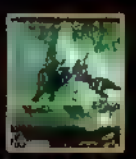
BROTHERS IN ARMS

KEYWORD: BIA

Midnight Bowling

KEYWORD: BOWL

KING KONG



KEYWORD: KONG

MIDNIGHT POOL

KEYWORD: POOL

ASPHALT

KEYWORD: A2

gameloft

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▲ This "spicy move" is muy caliente. Hence the explosion, I guess.

▲ With this lame move, you become a bullet-spewing tornado.

TOTAL OVERDOSE: A GUNSLINGER'S TALE IN MEXICO

Grande theft auto

SOMEWHERE IN THE OFFICES OF publisher Eidos Interactive, the concept of *Total Overdose* takes form....

Developer Dude: I want this game to play like a Robert Rodriguez movie!

Marketing Guy: Great idea! *Spy Kids* raked in huge profits at the box office!

DD: I was actually picturing *Desperado*, but with open-ended *Grand Theft Auto*–style gameplay.

MG: Even better! That gangster stuff is hot. Let's sign a hip-hop mariachi soundtrack and get it done.

DD: First, we take *Max Payne*'s bullet-time effects and add a *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*–ish combo system. The hero can perform a slow-motion dive out of a car, bounce off a wall, spring back into the air, and shoot an oil drum—incinerating a group of enemies for big points. We can even include some really over-the-top "loco" moves. What do you think?

MG: Interesting...and I do like the on-foot controls. We have salsa-flavored environments and slick moves, but what else? How's the story shaping up?

DD: I'm thinking something tongue-in-cheek. I mean, who walks around with machine-gun guitar cases?

MG: I think gamers are gonna eat up the mindless action. However, if you ask me, we need more over-the-top story elements—more crass, edgy stuff to pull in that lucrative junior-high teen crowd.

DD: Like what?

MG: Throw in some "Burrito Blast" and "Gringo Frenzy" combo moves. Or how about some insult-laden dialogue like, "How is it your hair's greasier than the food?" No need for subtlety here, my friend.

DD: If you don't think people will get it, we can always redo the script. We just need extra time to fix some small bugs, brush up some textures, and polish the physics before shipping the game. Right now, the characters look blocky and cars practically glide down the road.

MG: No chance! We can always patch it later.

DD: Sigh.

/Darren Gladstone

A cheese-filled jalapeño of action.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD **VERDICT** ★★★½☆

DESPERADO, BUT WITH OPEN-ENDED *GRAND THEFT AUTO*-STYLE GAMEPLAY.

▲ The physics can get a little goofy—shrapnel occasionally defies the laws of gravity.

▲ Who needs a skateboard when you can pull off slick combos with guns? Double wall-walk kill!

▲ One cool game mechanic: the ability to leap from moving cars.

▲ No, your eyes don't deceive you: That's one mean midget gangsta over there on the right.

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and much more at www.gamevideos.com

1UP.com [illegible]

▲ The world's scariest dry-cleaning shop.

▲ That's you, Matthew Kane, post-stroggification. Now go kill stuff.

▲ Raven came up with some nice scripted events in the single-player campaign, including this fun ride down an elevator with Dr. Fugly, or whatever his name is, in close pursuit.

QUAKE 4

Big, loud, and beautiful

IF *CIVILIZATION IV* IS THE GAMING equivalent of a bowl of Wheaties—good and good for you!—then *Quake 4* is like a big, tooth-decaying bowl of Cap'n Crunch, with maybe an extra helping of sugar and a doughnut on top. You know you should not like this stuff. You know you can do a lot better. And yet, despite the damage you know it must be doing to your insides, and to your moral fiber, you keep on shoveling it down anyway, because it's just so damn good. Such is the case with *Quake 4*, id Software's latest entry in its blockbuster shooter series, which offers nothing particularly new or innovative, and yet still manages to entertain because sometimes retro and dumb and obvious is exactly what we want—especially when it's done as slickly and professionally as it is here.

Certainly first-person shooters have come a long way since id unleashed the first *Quake* on the world back in 1996. At the time, running and gunning was all we needed, especially when delivered in a 3D environment as astounding as the original game's. *Quake* was the cutting edge at the time—nothing came close—and for years "*Quake* killer" was the moniker applied to any game that even dared to compete.

Now, of course, in the post-*Half-Life* world, with shooters taking the genre into all sorts of innovative directions, you could argue that the world doesn't really need *Quake* anymore. We have the deep multiplayer brilliance of *Battlefield 2*, the brutally wicked A.I. of *F.E.A.R.* (see review, page 96), and the squad-based sophistication of *Brothers in Arms*. So, seriously, do we really need to pick up our shotguns and trundle down dark corridors after the strogg—again?

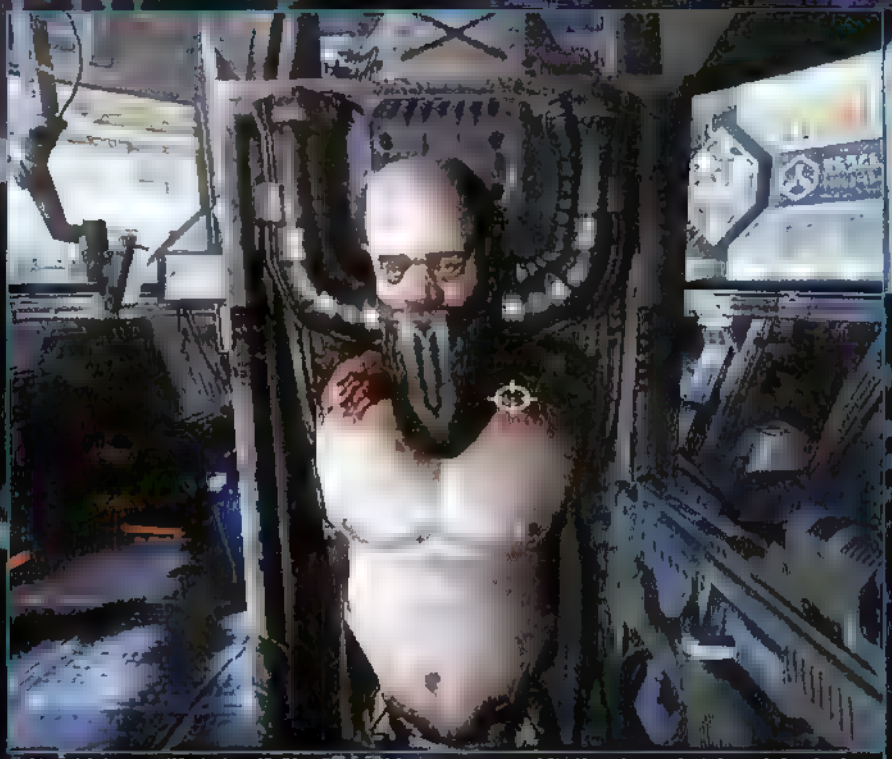
WE COULD BE HEROES

My answer is a qualified yes. For *Quake 4*, id Software hired longtime companion Raven Software (*Heretic*, *Hexen*, *Elite Force*) to design a single-player campaign, and this move definitely paid off. Single player presents a back-to-basics thrill ride of a game that, in its simplicity, will appeal far beyond the hardcore shooter crowd, with well-paced levels, a good story, a few genuinely creepy moments, and—as usual—some of the best graphics in all of PC gaming. Tougher and more innovative games are out there, for sure. But *Quake 4*—big, loud, and beautiful—does exactly what it was meant to do.

Picking up the plotline from *Quake II* (1999's *Quake III: Arena* was multiplayer only), *Quake 4* puts you back on the planet Stroggos in the 21st century, where Earth wages a desperate counterattack against the evil cybernetic strogg, who—like most evil space aliens—seek to conquer our humble planet. You play as generic Marine beefcake Matthew Kane, a square-jawed hero with the magical ability to carry multiple guns at once and switch instantaneously between them even while crawling through sewer pipes.

It's strictly old-school stuff. Level after level, you twist and turn through the labyrinthine strogg base—aided sometimes by NPC allies, but most oftentimes solo—gunning down hordes of monsters and encountering the occasional puzzle or two on the way to the next boss. Within this limited format, however, Raven gets it right, with frantic mayhem broken up by suspenseful moments of quiet and a uniformly satisfying collection of

SOMETIMES WE JUST WANT *CON AIR* AND A GARBAGE CAN FULL OF POPCORN. THAT'S WHAT *QUAKE 4* IS.



▲ You think your life is hard? Check out this guy: captured by the strogg, butchered, hooked up to some kind of machine, still alive. All you do is play PC games. So stop complaining.

▲ The horrific "stroggification" cut-scene.

▲ Hi guys. I'm going to circle-strafe around you and kill you now. It'll just be a sec, OK?

weapons—many of which get upgraded as the game proceeds—to help you get the job done.

Unlike *F.E.A.R.*, however, the enemy A.I. here is slow (to be generous), and anyone with even rudimentary circle-strafing abilities can have most of the moronic strogg confused and helpless (and then dead) in seconds. Only when the game throws dozens of enemies at you at once does it really get challenging—and even then it doesn't come close to the challenges posed by *F.E.A.R.* And Raven's attempts to expand the basic gameplay with a few scenes of vehicular combat, while admirable, enjoy only mild success, coming off more like chapters in an arcade rail-shooter from eight years ago than anything a modern shooter should have.

OH YOU PRETTY THINGS

But what it may lack in challenge, *Quake 4* gives back in atmosphere and looks, thanks to id's *Doom 3* engine. No, eye candy is not a substitute for gameplay, by any means, but here, almost every single room is a wonder to behold, with stunning displays of light and shadow and painstaking structural detail—and it adds up. I'm no graphics whore, even remotely, yet the craft that went into creating this world is amazing and does keep you moving forward, just to see what's coming next (*F.E.A.R.* looks plain and sterile in comparison).

The graphics also add to the game's overall gruesomeness—*Quake 4*'s creepier than *Doom 3*. The now-notorious "stroggification" cut-scene, in which you watch as your body falls under a gruesome butcher's knife, is one of the single most disturbing scenes I've ever seen in a game, and the mangled and tortured bodies attached to walls, hanging from hooks, and spewing out of machines as you make your way through the game give *Quake 4* more of an emotional impact than anyone has a right to expect. You see this stuff and want those strogg *dead*.

WHAM BAM THANK YOU MA'AM

It's easy enough to dis *Quake 4* for what it doesn't have, especially with so many other more sophisticated shooters out there. But one doesn't need to apologize for it, either, because it's a fast, solid ride from beginning to end—kind of like going to the movies. Though we may get a more satisfying intellectual experience and feeling of self-worth watching the latest existential French romance, at times, we just want *Con Air* and a garbage can full of popcorn. That's what *Quake 4* is. And I mean that in the nicest possible way. **/Jeff Green**

WHITHER MULTIPLAYER?

Oddly enough, the aspect of *Quake 4* to get the shortest shrift is what used to be the hallmark of the series: multiplayer. While *Quake III: Arena* is multiplayer only, here it appears almost as an afterthought, or even a different game (where are the vehicles from the single-player game?). Some of the *Quake III* maps simply get rehashed in the *Doom 3* engine. And while those maps are awesome—and admittedly still fun to play in their new incarnations—well, we've seen 'em already. Add to that the rather criminal lack of bots (not that any *Quake* game has ever had them, but come on, it's 2006) and the complete absence of any new gameplay modes, and you get the feeling that the designers either ran out of time or were just lazy. Straight-up deathmatching never gets old, and these *Quake* maps are as good as it gets—but still, given that this series used to live and die by its multiplayer strengths, it's hard not to feel disappointed.

Breaks no ground, but good old-school stuff with amazing graphics.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ★★★½☆

COLUMN

LINE OF ATTACK

Your monthly guide to hardcore war-gaming

PUBLISHER BATTLEFRONT.COM revealed some welcome news this month: The company announced plans for the Hunting Tank Software–developed *Combat Mission Campaigns*, an add-on for *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* that finally allows players to place their *CM* games in an operational context.

In typical *CM* fashion, the game's interface still consists of a simple map for you to move your units across. The new fog-of-war mechanic simulates your units' ability to perform reconnaissance and communicate with headquarters in a timely fashion through the use of runners, direct or point-to-point radio contact, and couriers on motorcycles and half-tracks.

Campaigns also keeps track of the operational situation and does all the work of choosing maps and allocating forces when encounters occur, with the option to autoresolve combat if you wish it to do so. Barbarossa, Stalingrad, Operation Mars (the failed 1942 Soviet counterattack west of Moscow), Third Kharkov, Kursk, and Berlin make up the campaigns planned for this release. And best of all, it includes an option to play via PBEM.

Bad news on the *Anglo-German War* front, though: Schwerpunkt Games' companion game to *Russo-German War* arrived late, hence the lack of a proper review—so expect some coverage in next month's column. / Bruce Geryk *(For more war-gaming geekery, visit Bruce at grognards.1UP.com)*

▲ ***Combat Mission Campaigns*** **brings more detail to your *Barbarossa to Berlin* games.**

CONGRATULATIONS ON A JOB WELL DONE PILOT! YOUR REWARD IS THE LATEST FIGHTING MACHINE.

HEROES OF THE PACIFIC

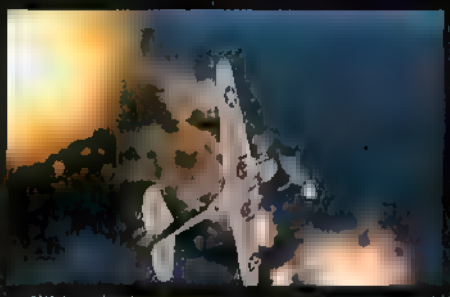
ENTER BILLY CROWE, A YOUNG AIR Force pilot stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Caught in the middle of a surprise attack, fighting swarms of Japanese fighters and bombers, he watches in helpless horror as the battleship *Arizona* explodes and sinks, taking over 1,000 men down with it—including his brother. That's the shoot-em-up lifted above the average by a wealth of style, a dollop of story, and an unrelenting sense of "the fate of the world is on my shoulders" tension.

It also radiates a heavy sense of style. In a consistent attempt to keep you in the mood of the era, the game presents your options via WWII posters, and the campaign unfolds by way of a voiceover, stylized snapshots, and a touch of intrigue. While *Heroes* includes five historical missions and an instant-action mode, the heart of the game lies in the main campaign, and much of the rest of the content is made available as unlockable features earned in the campaign. These items include plane upgrades and new aircraft (a total of 36 fighters, level bombers, torpedo bombers, and dive bombers). You can select arcade or professional flight modes, but frankly, little difference exists between the two: This is a yank-and-bank shooter. You'll face scores of enemy aircraft, strafe dozens of ground targets, attack fleets of ships, and more.

Just don't expect a smooth flight, as *Heroes* may be too tough for some casual gamers. You often find yourself frantically trying to shoot down a sky full of bogies that swarm around you like starving mosquitoes in the middle of a swamp—and the mission suddenly ends because the enemy killed a certain number of friendly assets. Nevertheless, the addictive gameplay is a sign of quality; even after you curse the game for how unfair its missions are, the variety and atmosphere still compel you to hit Restart and give it just one more try. / Jeff Lackey

JUST DONT EXPECT A SMOOTH FLIGHT.

▲ **It all started when I was a child....**



▲ **With unlimited ammo, you can just hammer the trigger until the enemy goes down.**

▲ **The rear gunner on some bombers provides a nasty surprise.**

Great for joystick jockeys who like their games tough and frantic.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD **VERDICT** ★★★½☆

RAG DOLL KUNG FU

Kung faux

Online play features power-ups and weapons aplenty.

Kung Fu's mouseplay causes carpal tunnel. Try tai chi.

CHOP-SOCKY NECESSITIES: AN OPEN field, able-bodied actors, and a follo of *zam pows* to make pretend punches hit harder. *Rag Doll Kung Fu*, a low-fi labor of love from Lionhead Studios' Mark Healey and available via Valve's Steam service for a cheap $14.99, manages all three and more—namely, thrift shop costumes and screwy subtitles (e.g., "Do not flick the testicles of an ape, as an angry ape will pummel your face in"). And that's just in the live-action shorts that play between battles.

Kung Fu's playable parts are good for giggles, too. See your disciple as a string-less string puppet (hence "rag doll") and your mouse as the marionette controls that make him dance (that's the "kung fu"). As game interfaces go, this one's both good and bad; intuitive and tricky. Just drag and drop one foot in front of the other to get from place to place, put an arm or leg in the path of an incoming limb to parry, and take hold of a hand and guide it to a mushroom on the ground to charge chi. Here's the thing, though: The camera pans and zooms as it pleases, so keeping tabs on yourself is tough enough, let alone pretzel-bending into a stamina-boosting lotus stance while ducking baddies. Dialing down the speed setting (via the options menu) helps, but that also slows the audio effects and everything else along with the action. Eh, everything except for those crack-up cut-scenes.

/ Shawn Elliott

Play it—if only for the Buddha-blessed presentation and bonkers idea.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT

★★★☆☆

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- and UP TO 144 COMMANDS. CUSHIONED KEYS,
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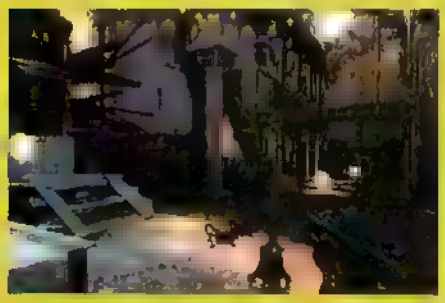
And everything else your digital heart requires to bring an end to all you face.

Saitek

THE NEXT LEVEL

CGW's guide to the latest patches and postrelease content

▲ Old man, check. The sea, check.



▲ Admire the lifelike lighting at your own peril.

HALF-LIFE 2: THE LOST COAST

EDITORS' CHOICE

FIRST: THE ALL-NEW *HALF-LIFE 2* LEVEL, Lost Coast, is free. Second: Rather than run the focus group routine, Valve is using the level to give its entire fan base a voice. If we like its lifelike lighting and interactive commentary mode (and we do), the company will implement the features in forthcoming releases (and it is).

Turn the behind-the-scenes stuff off and *Lost Coast* is shorter than short—a lickety-split run through postcard-pretty tide pools, up cliffs, and into a church turned Combine outpost. Stop to worship the sun through stained glass, solve a single puzzle, blast baddies, and voilà: Valve just packed more atmosphere into a tiny snippet than most shooters muster, period. Keep the commentary on, and you're looking at a few more informative minutes. Stiff-sounding show-and-tell wouldn't matter much elsewhere, but this comes from the folks who made pheromones fearsome and robots our friends—and what they have to say is so interesting and insightful that cuing the next bobbing caption becomes incentive enough to stay tuned. And when full-of-ideas-but-never-full-of-himself director Gabe Newell offers his e-mail address and asks for our feedback, right away we know what to request: Give *HL2* the treatment, too, please. / **Shawn Elliott**

More, please.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★★½

PLAY IT ON THE DVD!

GOLF?

LOOKING FOR A REALISTIC GAME OF golf? This isn't it...at least, not quite yet. But what *Golf?* does have on realistic simulators like *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* is an undeniably unique sense of style. Don't expect anything fancy here: The visuals consist of simple polygons, static black-and-white backgrounds, a robotic player avatar, and an equally strange-looking caddie. But these graphical sensibilities suit the game's clearly experimental nature—which quickly becomes apparent through *Golf?*'s quirky gameplay elements.

After scouting out the hole, picking an appropriate club, and choosing a prime spot from which to tee off, you whack the ball across the field by dragging your mouse back and forth in a fluid motion. Between strokes you can ride around in a golf cart that comes equipped with over-the-top physics and speed-enhancing "rocket sauce" or roam the course from the viewpoint of your oddball caddie, who serves no functional role whatsoever. The current beta version (which supports up to four players via LAN) doesn't account for factors such as wind or advanced swinging techniques and features only nine holes, so you'll blow through it pretty quickly. The four-man design team labels *Golf?* (currently in public beta) as "something we eventually hope to charge you for," which may mean a more fully featured product is yet to come. / **Ryan Scott**

▲ These orange trails display your hit trajectory. Hopefully, you're a much better golfer than I am.

▲ That weird boxy dude back there is actually your trusty caddie.

A fun little experiment.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★☆☆

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

Warning: Casual Potter fans will be towed

Up to three players can work together to cast spells and solve puzzles.

256MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: Gamepad MULTIPLAYER: Helmet (2–3 players)

WHEN I FIRST HEARD I WAS REVIEWing the new *Harry Potter* game, I was ecstatic—almost as excited as my dad, editor-in-chief Jeff Green, is when he gets a manicure. [You're grounded—*Ed.*] But then I wondered...how the heck do you make a good game out of a 734-page book? Answer: chop everything out except the main points and make minigames out of everything. These range from exploring Hogwarts to surviving a dragon chase to fighting the sinister Voldemort. *Harry Potter* addicts should be happy—but since *Goblet* cuts out so much, I wouldn't recommend it for first-time *Potter* players.

Why? One big reason: The keyboard controls really bug me. EA made *Goblet* for consoles as well as PCs, and the action-adventure gameplay doesn't work so well on a keyboard. Maneuvering and spellcasting get annoying and confusing, especially if you've played previous *Potter* PC games. Unless you enjoy frustration, definitely read the manual before starting. At least the graphics look great, so you get a nice view while bumbling around as Harry, Ron, or Hermione.

Since you can control only one of these three characters at a time, the CPU fills in for the other two. You'll definitely need all three of 'em, though; everyone pitches in to cast spells and solve puzzles that one wizard can't do solo. But sometimes the other two characters just get in the way thanks to the dumb A.I. It's a good thing that you can play the game with two friends on the same PC instead.

Overall, I enjoyed *Goblet*...once I understood how the spells and the controls functioned. It's worth playing if you want a moderately easy game; I'd recommend it to grade-school kids who like the books. So what are you waiting for? Dragons, magic, puzzles, and horrible controls await!

/ Sarah Jaisser Green, 6th grade

AT LEAST THE GRAPHICS LOOK GREAT, SO YOU GET A NICE VIEW WHILE BUMBLING AROUND AS HARRY, RON, OR HERMIONE.

Good for *Potter* addicts, but bad controls bog it down.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

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Nothing brightens up another gloomy night on the island better than a good bonfire.

Arrange these letters to spell out the correct phrase and uncover a secret grotto.

AGATHA CHRISTIE: AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

Murder, '30s style

PUBLISHER: The Adventure Company DEVELOPER: AWE Games GENRE: Adventure ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: 850MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 1.8GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: 1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM PLAYER: None

AS THE WEATHER SETTLES INTO WINTER gloom, the time is perfect for brewing some tea, throwing a blanket across your lap, and snuggling up to a warm PC with an adventure game. *Agatha Christie: And Then There Were None* suits the mood perfectly. Despite a few off notes, such as zombielike character movement and occasional scripting problems, *ATTWN* offers up a satisfying murder mystery.

A stormy backdrop sets the tone, as the mysterious U.N. Owen entices 10 strangers to attend a meeting on Shipwreck Island. These individuals soon learn, via a recording played by the unsuspecting butler, that Owen believes them all guilty of murder—and wants justice. Soon after these accused guests arrive, one turns up dead—and it becomes apparent that this U.N. Owen—"unknown," as one guest cleverly figures out—plans to snuff out their lives, one by one.

The game follows the plot of Christie's novel but adds a new player-controlled character: Patrick Narracott, a ferryman who becomes stranded with the others when his boat wrecks. Both Owen's identity and the story line undergo some tweaking, so those familiar with Christie's book can still enjoy the mystery.

THINKING CAP NEEDED

Quick reflexes take a backseat to patience and brainpower here; figuring out how to combine and use inventory objects can be rewarding, if at times ultrachallenging. However, the game's linear track creates problems; for example, if you decide to cut through the kitchen to reach the dining room early on, Narracott tells a character he's sorry for the loss of his wife...before learning of her death. Characters also tend to stand around inanimately when you're not interacting with them, and you get the usual slew of arcane adventure-game puzzles.

Still, clever mysteries and a classic '30s-era setting far outweigh the drawbacks of stiff animations and linearity problems. Unlike the book, *ATTWN* forces you to figure stuff out to progress—making it ideal for true armchair sleuths. / **Carrie Shepherd**

A tad creaky, but pepped up with plenty of spine-tingling and head-scratching action.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ★★★★☆

LAW & ORDER: CRIMINAL INTENT

Criminally broken

PUBLISHER: Legacy Interactive DEVELOPER: Legacy Interactive GENRE: Adventure ESRB RATING: M REQUIRED: 800MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 2GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED: None MULTIPLAYER: None

IN *LAW & ORDER: CRIMINAL INTENT*, you play Detective Robert Goren, tasked with solving four interconnected murders. To this end, you must collect evidence, interview witnesses, and interrogate suspects. However, rather than using his investigative skills to close these cases, Detective Goren's time would be better spent trying to deduce why Legacy Interactive released such a buggy, crash-prone game.

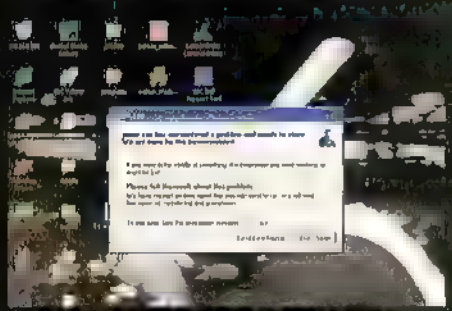
Criminal Intent gets off to a good enough start; each case presents an interesting story and re-creates familiar aspects of the TV series, but the game quickly becomes repetitive and frustrating. Even straightforward tasks suffer unnecessary complications—in one case, you cannot search a victim's home until you find his keys, go to his office, and then interview a coworker to find out where said victim lived. What ever happened to simply checking the victim's ID?

WHO KILLED THIS GAME?

In lieu of actual logic, you get the occasional logic minigame. Though working through a sliding puzzle may seem like an odd task during a murder investigation, I wasn't bothered by these adventure game conventions, as they broke up the otherwise repetitive gameplay. What did bother me, though: system-wide bugs, which range from the entertaining (my character did a jumping jack each time he left his office) to the annoying (pathfinding issues) to the aggravating (frequent desktop crashes). Because of these problems, I was unable to actually complete any of the cases presented to me.

Law & Order could easily be fashioned into an engaging adventure game franchise. But with *ER* and now *Criminal Intent*, developer Legacy Interactive seems intent on creating shoddy products that bank on a TV series' popularity for some quick sales before the negative word of mouth spreads. / **Tom Edwards**

Detective Goren can switch from good cop to bad cop in mid-conversation—something his interrogation subjects seem wholly oblivious to.



Solve this mystery: Why does the game keep crashing?

Guilty as charged.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

VERDICT ☆☆☆☆☆

REWIND

What should you play today? Names in blue indicate Editor's Choice games

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Act of War: Direct Action	June 05	★★★★½
Advent Rising	Nov 05	★★★½
Aerial Strike	June 05	★★½
Age of Empires III	Dec 05	★★★½
Area 51	Sept 05	★★★½
The Bard's Tale	Oct 05	★★★★½
Baseball Mogul 2006	July/Aug 05	★★★★½
Battle of Britain II: Wings of Victory	Dec 05	★★★½
Battlefield 2	Sept 05	★★★★★
Black & White 2	Dec 05	★★½
Blitzkrieg 2	Dec 05	★★★½
BloodRayne 2	Oct 05	★★★½
Bone: Out From Boneville	Dec 05	★★★½
Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood	Dec 05	★★★★½
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	June 05	★★★★½
Close Combat: First to Fight	July/Aug 05	★★½
Codename: Panzers—Phase Two	Nov 05	★★★½
Combat: Task Force 121	July/Aug 05	★½
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	July/Aug 05	★★½
Crown of Glory: Europe in the Age of Napoleon	Oct 05	★★½
Dangerous Waters	June 05	★★★★½
Darwinia	Dec 05	★★★★½
Day of Defeat: Source	Dec 05	★★★★½
Diplomacy	Dec 05	★½
Domination	June 05	★★★½
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	July/Aug 05	★★★★½
Down in Flames	Dec 05	★★★★½
Dragonshard	Dec 05	★★★★½
Dragoon	April 05	★★½
DRIV3R	July/Aug 05	★★½
Dungeon Lords	Sept 05	½
Dungeon Siege II	Nov 05	★★★½
Elite Warriors: Vietnam	July/Aug 05	★½
Empire Earth II	June 05	★★★★½

▲ Age of Empires III

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
ER	Oct 05	★½
Fable: The Lost Chapters	Nov 05	★★★½
Fantastic 4	Sept 05	★½
Fate	Sept 05	★★★½
FlatOut	Sep 05	★★★½
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	April 05	★★½
Freedom Force vs. The 3rd Reich	May 05	★★★★★
Gary Grigsby's World at War	June 05	★★★½
Grand Theft Auto San Andreas	Sept 05	★★★★½
GTR FIA Racing	Oct 05	★★★★½
Guild Wars	July/Aug 05	★★★★½
Hearts of Iron II	April 05	★★½
Heritage of Kings: The Settlers	June 05	½
Imperial Glory	Sept 05	★★½
Indigo Prophecy	Dec 05	★★★★½
Knights of Honor	July/Aug 05	★★★★½
Legacy: Dark Shadows	April 05	½
Lego Star Wars	July/Aug 05	★★★½
Lost Admiral Returns	May 05	★★★½
Madden NFL 06	Nov 05	★★★½
The Matrix Online	July/Aug 05	★★★½
MVP Baseball 2005	July/Aug 05	★★★★½
Myst V: End of Ages	Dec 05	★★★½
NASCAR SimRacing	May 05	★★★★½
Need for Speed Underground 2	April 05	★★★★½
Obscure	July/Aug 05	★★½
Pariah	Sept 05	★★½
Playboy: The Mansion	April 05	½
Project: Snowblind	July/Aug 05	★★★½
Psychonauts	June 05	★★★★½
Psychotoxic	July/Aug 05	½
Raging Tiger	April 05	★½
Restricted Area	Oct 05	½
Return to Mysterious Island	April 05	★★★★½

▲ The Sims 2: Nightlife

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Rome: Total War—Barbarian Invasion	Dec 05	★★★½
RYL: Path of the Emperor	Oct 05	½
Second Sight	July/Aug 05	★★★½
Serious Sam II	Dec 05	★★★★½
Silent Hunter III	June 05	★★★★★
The Sims 2: Nightlife	Dec 05	★★★★½
The Sims 2: University	May 05	★★★★½
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	June 05	★★★★★
Star Wars KOTOR II: The Sith Lords	April 05	★★★★½
Star Wars Republic Commando	May 05	★★★★½
Stronghold 2	Sept 05	★½
Supremacy	July/Aug 05	½
SWAT 4	June 05	★★★★★
T-72: Balkans on Fire!	Oct 05	★★★½
Tin Soldiers: Julius Caesar	Sept 05	★★★½
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	Dec 05	★★★★½
TrackMania Sunrise	Sept 05	★★★★½
Vendetta Online	May 05	½
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War—Winter Assault	Dec 05	★★★★½
WinSPMBT	Nov 05	★★★½
World Championship Tennis	July/Aug 05	½
World Soccer Winning Eleven 8 International	July/Aug 05	★★★★½

▲ Serious Sam II

MANUFACTURER: **Falcon Northwest**
PRODUCT: **Mach V**

FALCON NORTHW

As cool—and expensive—as it gets

FALCON NORTHWEST HAS BEEN SHIPPING high-end gaming systems for almost as long as *Computer Gaming World* has been in print. Over the years, the company has remained focused on delivering maximum gaming performance, though not without a cost. While Falcon Northwest does offer a budget system, its Mach V systems have long been the company's flagship. The latest Mach V gaming rig keeps the flame alive.

Just about every aspect of gaming is addressed here: a fast CPU, low-latency memory, twin BFG GeForce 7800 GTX OC graphics cards in SLI mode, and dual Maxtor 300GB hard drives set up as a RAID 0 array. About the only item that's not maxed out is the soundcard, which is the "entry level" version of Creative Labs' new X-Fi line. While it lacks the X-RAM of the pricier X-Fi variants, it's still a premium soundcard by any other measure.

BIRD OF PREY

The heart of the system is the overclocked revision E Athlon 64 FX-57, built on AMD's 90nm manufacturing process. AMD ships the FX-57 unlocked, which means that users and OEMs can overclock the CPU if they have a cooling system and motherboard capable of handling it. The motherboard is the Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe, which has the voltage regulators to handle an overclocked FX-57. The motherboard can also handle running the Corsair XMS Pro memory modules at slightly tweaked voltages, which means they can be set to very low latencies—CAS 2-2-2-5 in this case.

The Mach V could have been overclocked simply by increasing the CPU clock multiplier by a full notch, but Falcon instead chose to increase it by a half increment (from 14x to 14.5x) while also increasing the memory clock to 207MHz from the default 200MHz. This means the CPU still runs at 3.0GHz (14.5 times 207MHz), but with better memory bandwidth, which helps when it comes to gaming. And that's what this system is all about. The FX-57 stays cool at 3.0GHz due to the Sanyo Denki liquid-cooling system. While it's a liquid cooler, it's completely sealed and guaranteed for seven years.

If the CPU is the heart of the system, the soul is the matched BFG GeForce 7800 GTX OC graphics cards. BFG clocks these babies higher than the default clock, running the core at 460MHz (versus 430MHz) and the memory at 1.3GHz DDR (versus the 1.2GHz DDR standard). The two PCI Express cards run in SLI mode and deliver prodigious framerates at 1600x1200. They even deliver good framerates if you have one of those spiffy—and oh-so-pricey—widescreen displays

Such neat cabling! If only our office desks were organized this well.

that offer 1920x1200 resolution.

A pair of Maxtor DiamondMax 10 drives in RAID 0 mode handles the storage chores. (You can get them configured in RAID 1 mode if you prefer redundant data security over sheer performance.) Falcon also supplies a pair of optical drives—one dedicated DVD-ROM drive, plus a DVD burner for backup or creating your own movies.

The front of the Mach V's case features a cutout of the company's logo, which glows blue behind the cutout. When we opened up the box, the cables inside were neatly dressed, and we could easily access all the hardware. One of the slicker aspects of the liquid-cooler design is how it's mounted. The small pump assembly is mounted in the top of the case and doesn't block access to any of the internals of the system. Since the radiator fan is also mounted in the top of the case, you won't want to pile up game boxes or other items over the exhaust fan. One big advantage of the liquid cooling, though, is that the system runs quieter than an equivalent air-cooled system.

BIG MONEY

The big downside is that this will set you back a cool $5,245, including the deeper Icon case needed to handle the sealed liquid-cooling unit. That's not cheap, so the next question is: How does it perform? The answer: like a champ. Note that we ran all our benchmarks at 4x full-screen antialiasing and 8x anisotropic filtering, except the Shader Mark 3.0 version of *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* (its SM3 version won't do FSAA). We got some pretty stunning numbers as a result. *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, in particular, can crush even some high-end graphics cards, so running at 75fps is great. We also tested the system in an intensive LAN gaming session, and the whole affair ran smoothly, with no glitches or crashes, even when we had it overclocked.

If you want to spend even more money, Falcon Northwest offers glossy, car-finish-quality paint jobs—and even custom graphics and special-sized window and lighting treatments. Be prepared to be amazed at the final price, however. On the other hand, you can also buy a system without liquid cooling for about $260 less, which will drop it below that magical five grand number. (But if you're spending this much anyway, why skimp?)

Note, finally, that all these prices are just for the system—no monitor, keyboard, or speakers included. But your five grand will keep you gaming at least until the post-Windows Vista games start shipping. By then, all of us will be upgrading. **/ Loyd Case**

Mach V $5245

About the only thing that keeps us from calling this a perfect system is the high price.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD **VERDICT** ★★★★½

YOUR FIVE GRAND WILL KEEP YOU GAMING AT LEAST UNTIL THE POST-WINDOWS VISTA GAMES START SHIPPING.

TEST MACH V

INSIDE

110 REVIEW
Lowered Expectations
ATI's budget X1300 Pro gives a bum deal.

111 REVIEW
Calling the Audible
Logitech's newest speakers go wireless.

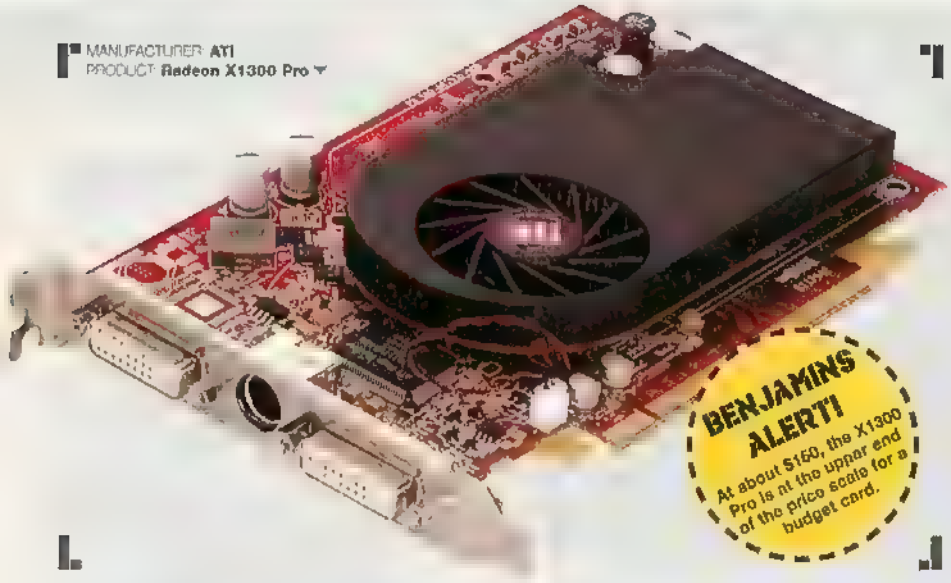
Making Sense of 3D GameGauge Lite

Each system goes through an exhaustive series of benchmark tests in order to assess overall performance and raw speed values. Benchmarking consists of both the industry's undisputed reference synthetic benchmark utility, 3DMark05, along with *CGW*'s own real-world game benchmarking suite, 3D GameGauge Lite. 3DGG Lite consists of a brilliant collection of A-list action games like *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Doom 3*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, *Far Cry*, and *Painkiller*. 3DGG Lite video configurations are set at 1280x1024 resolution with 2x antialiasing and 4x anisotropic filtering enabled, except for *Halo*, which gets no benefit from either technique. Results are then tabulated and posted as a raw geomean score for your reference.

3D GameGauge Lite

HOW OUR GRAPH WORKS We graph a product's benchmark scores to demonstrate how it compares to the scores of other products we've reviewed in the last six months. During that time, the lowest 3D GameGauge Lite score we've seen is 40; as of now, the highest is 111.7.

MANUFACTURER: ATI
PRODUCT: Radeon X1300 Pro



BENJAMINS ALERT!
At about $150, the X1300 Pro is at the upper end of the price scale for a budget card.

LOW PRICE, LOW PERFORMANCE

With ATI's budget Radeon offering, you get what you pay for

LAST MONTH, WE EXAMINED ATI'S high-performance Radeon X1800 cards and noted that ATI was actually launching an entire family of graphics cards to be priced from $99 to $549. This month, we look at whether the X1300 Pro, which at $150 is at the upper end of the price scale for a budget card, is the right choice for people without tons of spare cash.

In short—it isn't.

THE COMPETITION

At a suggested price of $149, the X1300 Pro has three cards as its main competition. The first is ATI's own X700 Pro, a previous-generation 256MB card that has dropped in price from its original $199 starting point. Nvidia price drops have also pushed the GeForce 128MB 6600 GT to the $150 range. Most important, Nvidia has launched a new version of the GeForce 6600 featuring higher clock speeds and DDR2 memory; it should appear in the $99 to $129 price range. We compared these three cards to the X1300 Pro, using our favored battery of tests: 3DMark05, *Far Cry*, *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2*, the *Call of Duty 2* demo, *Serious Sam II*, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, and *F.E.A.R.*

UNDERPERFORMER

Overall, testing didn't go so well for the X1300. To begin with, its 3DMark05 results don't paint the card in the most positive light. The X1300 is a little bit faster than the DDR2 version of the GeForce 6600, but then again, it's $30 to $50 more expensive, too. When compared with other $150 cards, it falls behind.

The situation didn't improve much when it came to real-world game performance. In *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*, ATI's new card ran about as fast as a GeForce 6600 with DDR2 memory but was significantly slower than the other two $150 cards. It's no real surprise that Nvidia took the prize in *Doom 3*, given that Nvidia hardware is optimized to run the *Doom 3* engine well, but the Radeon X1300 Pro was the slowest of the lot, and significantly slower than the X700 Pro.

As for *Far Cry* and *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*...let's just say we started to see a pattern. The X1300 was slower than all the other cards in its price range. *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* can run in a Shader Model 1.1 mode that's compatible with all modern videocards or a Shader Model 3.0 mode available only to Nvidia cards. The latter allows the use of some limited high dynamic range (HDR) effects. We ran the benchmark in both SM 1.1 mode and SM 3.0 with HDR. Antialiasing is incompatible with HDR rendering on Nvidia's hardware, so we ran our two test resolutions with and without anisotropic filtering to keep a level playing field. We used an SM 2.0 path for the Radeon X700 Pro since that card does not support SM 3.0. The only time the Radeon X1300 Pro started to look good was when we stacked it up against a less-expensive GeForce 6600 DDR2 running the Shader Model 3.0 path, and then it was only about equally as fast, not faster.

ATI finally started to show a teeny tiny bit of muscle in *Serious Sam II*, where it was noticeably faster than the less-expensive 6600 with DDR2 memory. Unfortunately, it was also quite a bit slower than the other $150 cards. It ran *Call of Duty 2* fairly well compared to its competition in the same price range, although you'd want to turn down the graphics options below what we used in order to make the game smooth and playable.

In *F.E.A.R.*, Monolith's new hardware-crushing shooter, the X1300 Pro stacked up reasonably well with 2x AA and 4x AF enabled but fell behind without it and wasn't playable with these game settings at all. The vastly improved performance of the 6600 GT might be a glitch; *F.E.A.R.* will give a warning if you push the texture resolution past medium with a 128MB card, but we ignored the warning and ran it anyway. It's possible that the game will simply force a lower resolution in such a case.

AVOID IT

The Radeon X1300 Pro is a huge letdown. Because low-cost graphics cards sell in big numbers, it's important they deliver ever-increasing performance; in order for 3D software to move forward, the cards in this price range need to make big leaps. In some ways, the X1300 is a step backward. Previous-generation cards like the GeForce 6600 GT with 128MB and the Radeon X700 Pro with 256MB are now down to a similar $150 price point and are faster in almost all situations, usually by a very healthy margin. Nvidia's new low-cost card, the GeForce 6600 with DDR2, trades off performance wins with the X1300 Pro. It's faster in some games, slower in others, but we can call it a tie overall. There's just one sticking point: The promised price of GeForce 6600 cards with DDR2 is $30 to $50 less than the X1300 Pro's at launch.

This is the kind of performance we'd except out of $100 cards, and we'd be impressed with it in a $69 card. No way is it worth $150. Point the blame at the lack of pixel pipelines. No matter how much ATI has improved the usage efficiency, the card still has only four pixel pipes, which is half what the competition offers. If the price of this card drops to the sub-$100 range, it would be worth picking up. Priced at $150, it's just outclassed by clearly superior cards that have fallen in price over time. ATI's only hope is to drive down the cost of this card and get the Radeon X1600 cards on the market at reduced prices to fill the $150 space. /Jason Cross

WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO IS THAT $150 IS WAY TOO MUCH FOR THIS CARD.

Radeon X1300 Pro **$150**

If you have $150 to spend on a videocard, there's absolutely no reason to pick this one. It doesn't make up in features what it clearly lacks in performance.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

MANUFACTURER: Logitech
PRODUCT: Z-5450 DIGITAL 5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM

WOOFER WITHOUT WIRES

Logitech unfetters the satellites, but it'll cost ya

ANYONE WHO'S PLAYED A GAME IN TRUE 5.1 surround knows there's no going back—5.1 (or greater) is simply the way games are meant to be heard. But our PCs are often stuffed into a corner or against a wall, so there's no good place behind you to put a pair of satellites. And if you can solve that problem, there's the issue of how to run a pair of speaker wires to the sats. Logitech's new high-end wireless 5.1 system isn't cheap, but it does solve the wiring problem while offering plenty of power.

In truth, you can't really call the rear speakers "wireless," since each one needs to be plugged into an AC outlet, but since they operate on a wireless signal from the decoder, they don't require speaker wires. They're meant to be used within 28 feet of the decoder unit, so they aren't designed to fill a large room. Though they operate on the popular 2.4GHz band, we experienced zero interference from other equipment.

The Z-5450s are like other high-end PC speakers and include a powered subwoofer with an integrated amplifier, a control module/decoder unit, and five satellites. The system's total output is 315 watts RMS, which is more than enough for a PC or small living room setup. The subwoofer cranks out 116 watts, the front satellites 38 watts, the center 42 watts, and the wireless rear speakers 40.5 watts. The decoder has three 1/8-inch stereo jack inputs, a coaxial digital input, and two optical inputs, plus an extra 1/8-inch stereo line input jack and headphone output jack.

So, how does the system sound? Fantastic. At peak volumes, the speakers lose precision, but the system has no problem getting plenty loud before it gets to that point. Our one complaint: the default level of the subwoofer. The bass is overdriven, adding a low rumble to a lot of content that shouldn't have it and making the low end in bass-heavy music swallow the rest of the sound.

For gamers who want rear speakers without speaker wires, the Z-5450 Digital is a great choice. It won't match a good home theater system's ability to fill a large living room, but it delivers the goods for a PC or console gamer who isn't trying to play in a 30-foot-by-30-foot space. The biggest downside is the price—500 bones is a lot to shell out for a multimedia PC system. Logitech's own Z-5500 Digital is $100 cheaper and offers 500 watts of power and equivalent decoder functions. It's a much better buy if stringing wires to your rear speakers doesn't bother you. /Jason Cross

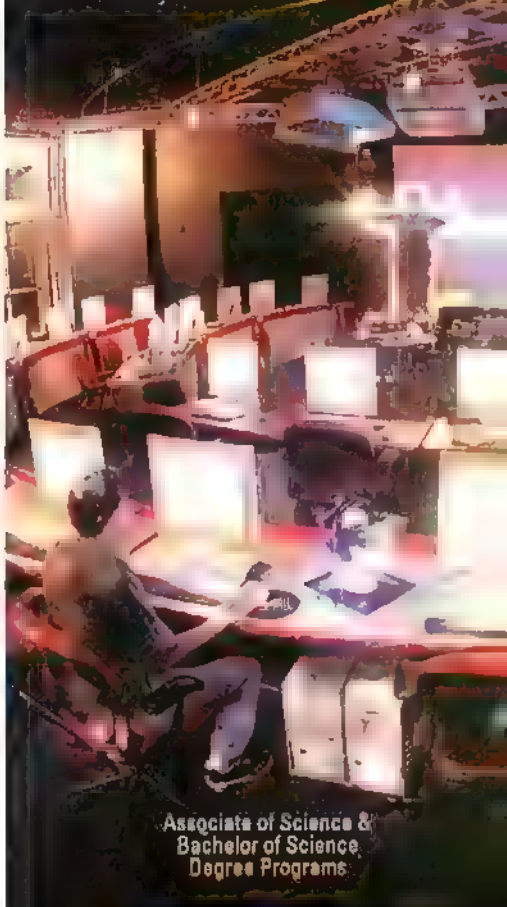
Z-5450 Speakers — $499

The wireless rear speakers work great but ain't cheap.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD **VERDICT** ★★★★½

FOR GAMERS WHO WANT REAR SPEAKERS WITHOUT THE HASSLE OF SPEAKER WIRES, THE Z-5450 IS A GREAT CHOICE.

PURSUE A CREATIVE CAREER IN THE DIGITAL ARTS



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MANUFACTURER Logitech
PRODUCT G15 Keyboard

TAKE CONTROL

Logitech's keyboard doesn't reinvent the wheel, it just makes it slicker

LOGITECH'S NEW G15 IS HARDLY THE first keyboard on the market targeted at gamers. Logitech enters into a space already occupied by products like PD Scientific's Wolf Claw (reviewed last month) and even more esoteric keyboard replacements like the Ergodex DX1 (see below). The G15, in contrast, takes a mostly traditional approach with a couple nice innovations.

At first glance, the G15 looks like your standard keyboard, with a traditional layout, full complement of function keys, and numeric keypad, plus two USB ports in back. It has good tactile feedback, as well—it feels better than most multimedia boards we've tested.

The G15 starts veering off the beaten path, however, with some nonstandard additions. The keyboard features gentle, adjustable blue backlighting for gaming in the dark, while up top is a large Mute button and a handy switch that toggles the keyboard between "standard" and "gaming" modes. What's the difference? Simple: Gaming mode disables the Windows key. That's it.

The G15's main attractions are the flip-up LCD screen at the top center and a series of 18 "G" keys to the left of the keyboard for programming macros. The LCD readout can be programmed to display macro and game mode information, among other functions, though it actually doesn't do much more than tell time out of the box. The 18 easily programmable G keys are accompanied by M1, M2, and M3 buttons that switch the G keys through three different "sets" of actions, providing, in effect, 54 available functions in whatever application you're using. Besides having to remember what all the macros do, the only other foreseeable issue might be the unusual sensation of having keys off to the left where one would expect the Escape, Tab, or Caps Lock keys.

It's hard to recommend the G15 unequivocally if you're mostly into shooters and action games—there's just not a lot here for you outside of a sturdy USB keyboard with a couple USB ports on the back. Those games simply don't have a lot that you really need to record macros for, but MMO gamers will find the simple macro-builders to be a godsend. For those paying monthly *World of WarCraft* fees, $80 is a drop in the bucket. /Jason Cross

Logitech G5 Keyboard $80

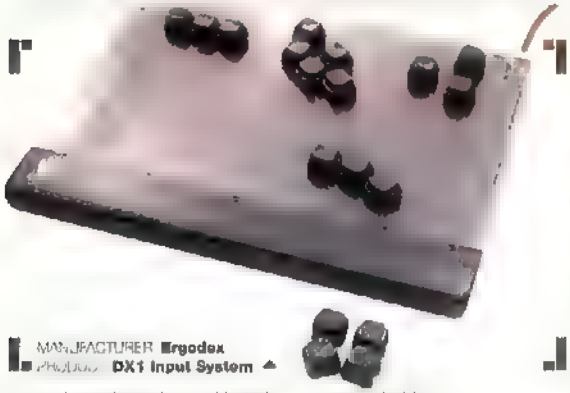
It's no slam dunk, but most MMO fiends will benefit here.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★½

FOR THOSE PAYING MONTHLY FEES FOR *WOW*, $80 IS NOTHING.

ALL KEYED UP

The 21st century keyboard is more than just fully programmable



MANUFACTURER Ergodex
PRODUCT DX1 Input System

IMAGINE THAT DURING A FIT OF GAMING rage, you threw your keyboard against the wall, then clumsily picked up the keys and proceeded to arrange them exactly as you'd like on a tray near the computer.

Enter the DX1 Input System, a USB peripheral designed for users to arrange (and rearrange) an assortment of programmable keys anywhere on its 11-inch-by-9-inch "DX1 Pad." The concept is simple: You begin with 25 DX1 keys, place as many of them as you want on the DX1 Pad in any layout you wish, and use the included software to assign functions to each one.

Designed as an alternative to the standard QWERTY keyboard setup, the DX1 Input System really lets you personalize the way you interface with your PC. With the easy-to-use software, you can assign each key its own macro, which can perform a variety of functions: a single key command ("Q"), a multi-key command ("Hello World," a list of actions), a text-block command (inserting any length of text), or program/file/URL commands. Each key communicates with the DX1 Pad wirelessly and sticks to the pad firmly through an adhesive that can be easily removed with a simple twisting motion.

The macros are handy and convenient, but the biggest plus is the way the DX1 can ease your comfort level if you spend long hours at the computer. For instance, I have big hands, and the WASD setup is too confining for me. After an hour or so in that same position, my hand starts to hurt. With the DX1, though, I can assemble a WASD-like setup but with the keys spread out more, giving my hand a chance to rest comfortably on the keys in a more natural position.

It's a great concept. Just keep in mind that at $150, it's still really just an accessory to go alongside your keyboard rather than a complete replacement. (The fact that it features only 25 keys is your first clue.) But those into programming macros and creative nerds who like the idea of building a custom layout should check it out. It's a slick piece of technology. /Jeremy Atkinson

DX1 Input System $150

While the technology is very cool, the price is not.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD VERDICT ★★★½☆

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EXTREMETECH

TECH MEDICS

Is your PC in critical condition? Dr. Loyd Case is on call

WOULD A GEFORCE 6800 GT 256MB CARD be a significant upgrade from an ATI 9800 Pro with 128MB? I'm limited to an AGP card, can't afford a 7800 GT anyway, and won't have the money until December. I'm planning to play *AOE3*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, and *Call of Duty 2*.

Steven Scott

You have the right idea, Steven, because each of those games you're eyeballing requires some serious horsepower to look its absolute best. The short answer is yes, a 6800 GT would be a substantial upgrade. You'll be moving to a card with 16 pixel pipes, more vertex engines, and double the memory. Of course, as the newer top-end boards start coming down in price, you might have some better news by December: You may be able to afford a 6800 Ultra card.

I'm having trouble playing *Battlefield 1942*. I have an AMD Athlon XP 1700+ processor and an Nvidia GeForce 4 Ti 4200 graphics card. When I play a local game with bots, it's all laggy and choppy. However, the card plays games like *Counter-Strike* and *Half-Life 2* just fine. Could it be my old SyncMaster 753DF monitor?

Dylan McDonald

It's not your monitor that's causing the problem here, it's the CPU. The second you load a small army into *Battlefield 1942*, your computer is going to start screaming, "MEDIC!" Think about it. The game is running with a lot of bots scrambling around onscreen at once. Coupled with the large maps, that can be a real drag on an older CPU like yours. So why do other games work fine? Well, *Counter-Strike* (usually) isn't running any bots at all, and when it does, they aren't nearly as numerous. As for *Half-Life 2*'s A.I., it's good, but you never have to deal with more than a dozen or so enemies running around a level at any given time.

Is PCI Express compatible with PCI-X? Could I plug a PCI-X SCSI controller into a PCIe motherboard slot? I believe PCIe is compatible with PCI devices, and it's my understanding that the PCI-X architecture is not vastly different from PCI's, but I need a definitive answer before I commit to some purchases.

Ryan Easton

Sorry, it's a no-go. PCI Express is command compatible with PCI, but it won't work, because they aren't electrically compatible. PCI Express uses serial, point-to-point signaling to carry data. You can bundle multiple PCIe lanes together to make wider slots, such as the PCIe x16 slots for graphics. However, the slots are not mechanically or electrically compatible with PCI-X. PCI-X is an extension of 32-bit PCI, offering 64-bit wide slots that can run at double the clock rate of PCI. Look on the bright side, Ryan: Since you aren't buying a PCI-X SCSI controller, you have a little extra spending money to get *F.E.A.R.*

I have a Dell XPS Series 4 with the Nvidia 6800 PCI Express card. Do you know if the new Nvidia 7800 GTX will work in this PC, and is it a good investment to make if I'm a big fan of first-person shooters?

Mark Brown

Yes, a GeForce 7800 GTX card will work in your Dell system, and obviously, it will be able to handle more than your current graphics card, but there is one key bit of information that you didn't pass along. What kind of CPU lurks inside the case? It's hard to say whether you'll see vastly improved performance. Some first-person shooters may be CPU bound on slower processors, but most see some benefit from a faster graphics card.

I have a Dell 8200 with a P4 2.5GHz, 512MB RAM, and an ATI Radeon 9700. I've been fine with most games, but when I play *F.E.A.R.*, the game is very choppy. I've tried installing new drivers, but it's still very jumpy. Do I need a new graphics card?

Jim McPherson

Ah, *F.E.A.R.*, it's both a great game and a slayer of lower-end systems. Hate to say it, Jim, but it may be time for you to step up to a completely new computer. OK, so that's probably not an option because, really, who's got the money for a whole rig when there are so many great games coming out? What would help a great deal, though, is adding another 512MB of RAM, assuming you can afford the pricey Rambus memory that the 8200 uses. After the memory upgrade, replacing the 9700 with something more modern, like the X850 XT, will help. If you can't do any of that, your last option is the unthinkable: turning down the graphics detail and running at a lower resolution!

Got questions? *Send them to Tech_Medics@ziffdavis.com*

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TOM vs. BRUCE

PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Ensemble
GENRE: Real-time strategy

LAST MONTH...
Tom went *Down in Flames*. We suspect his repeated jokes about Frank and Sylvester Stallone fared about the same with you, dear readers.

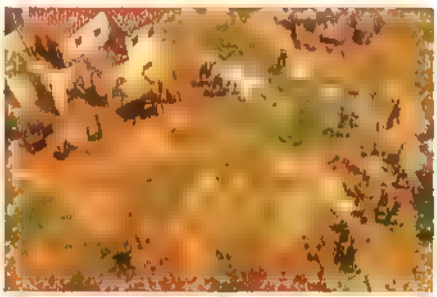
AGE OF EMPIRES III

It's a whole new world

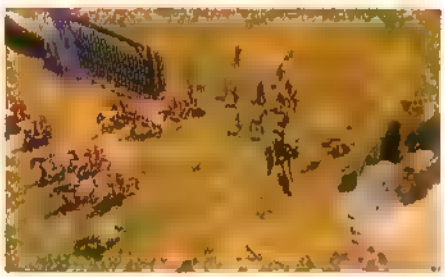
AFTER LOGGING IN SOME INDIVIDUAL time with *Age of Empires III*, Bruce and Tom were ready to take on one another on New World soil. Tom will play his 18th-level Ottoman city, the Holy City, and Bruce will play his 10th-level Russian city, Sankt Peterburg. The location is New England, which has a coast with a few landing places, a trade route running north to south down the middle of the map, and two Iroquois settlements to the north. Tom starts on the west side, Bruce starts on the east side.

BRUCE: *Age of Empires III* has this cool non-collectible card game feature: You build a deck of noncollectible cards to augment your abilities through periodic shipments from your "home city." Because this game is all about settler management and because I'm not so good at optimizing individual tree-chopping protocols, I have a couple of resource cards in there, including one that gives me 600 food. I also have some 10th-level cards that give me Scottish Highlanders and Finnish Hackapells. I have no idea what they do, but I assume that since you don't get them until you're 10th level, they're good. Notice Tom's built-in cheat of playing as a city that's eight levels better than mine.

▲ Don't you hate it when the hussars drop by without calling first?



▲ Tom's minutemen live up to their name by staying alive for just about a minute.



▲ Tom's carpentry (and strategy) skills are called into question as Bruce's zany soldiers go through Tom's wall instead of around it.

TOM: I think Bruce feels a little better when I explain that the alternative to my 18th-level Ottoman city is my 28th-level German city, with its four tailor-made decks: a naval deck, a settler wagon boom deck, a mercenary/gold production deck, and a turtling deck.

In the first several minutes of the game, my explorer, Aladdin Chick, manages to get sweet potatoes, skunk pelts, trapped beavers, concord grapes, mangolds, an Iroquois tomahawk warrior, and a Cherokee rifleman. Bruce gets something called chokecherry trees.

BRUCE: One of the many things I don't do well in multiplayer matches is manage my explorer, whom I was smart and savvy enough not to name after myself. Getting extra resources early on in games like this is important when you're trying to avoid getting steamrollered by the Tom Chick machine. But that means I have to click on things while simultaneously thinking about other things, and I'm much better at doing that when the game is paused. Unfortunately, you're allowed only 15 pauses in multiplayer, and there is no way to change that.

TOM: We're less than seven minutes into the game, and Bruce has already paused six times. I suspect it's part of some psychological warfare scheme he's cooked up, because every time the words "The Game Has Been Paused By Bruce" flash across the middle of my screen, I forget what I'm doing. I'm an RTS guy who gets into that real-

Players

Tom Chick
In addition to being one of the videogame industry's most prolific freelance journalists, Tom also runs the popular website QuarterToThree.com.

Bruce Geryk
When he's not writing about nerdy war games, Bruce Geryk spends his days putting a hard-earned medical degree to good use.

time Zen zone. Bruce, on the other hand, plays every RTS like it's *Civ 4*.

BRUCE: There is an art to rushing that totally eludes me. Go in too soon and you don't have enough rushers to do the job. Wait too long and it's no longer a rush because your opponent has had time to build defenses. Tom almost always manages to get advance units out to harass me before I can even get situated, so my strategy this time is to use cheap Russian strelets to force Tom to defend his settlers instead of messing with mine.

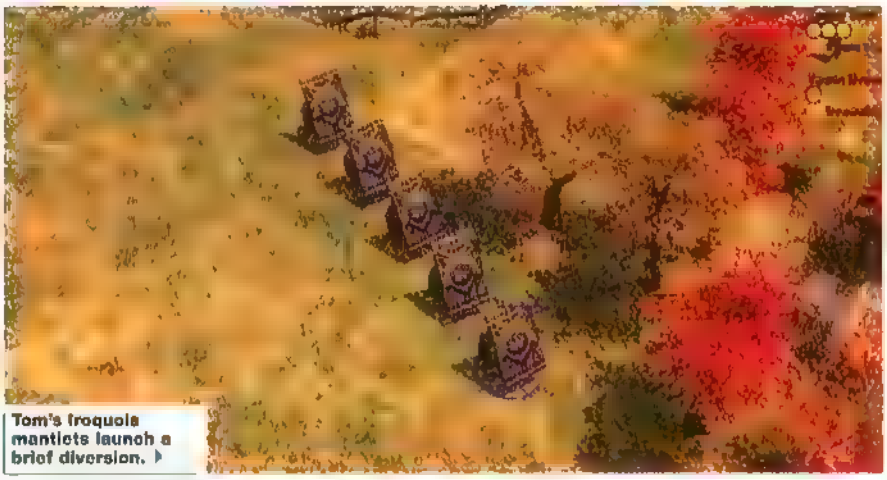
TOM: The Ottomans—whom I'll call the Turks because it makes them sound less like furniture—don't pay for their settlers, who are spit out for free at a slow, steady rate. This means the Turks are easier to play as but are also more brittle. They have a hard time replacing lost settlers, and they have to build a mosque to research settler technologies like millet system, Abbasid market, Koprulu viziers, and Galata tower district, all of which sound like something George Lucas thought up for his crappy movies. So while I'm busy researching Naboo moisture vaporators, Aladdin Chick and his party (consisting of his dog Mario and his Iroquois and Cherokee companions) run afoul of 20 strelets heading toward my base. I have yet to build a single military unit. When did Bruce get aggressive enough to rush me? In short, who taught him the correct way to play the oh-so-pun-worthy Russians?

BRUCE: The word "strelets" literally means "shooter." That's right, it's singular; the plural of "strelets" is "streltsy." If I lose this game, I plan to blame Ensemble's linguistically (and pause-ally) challenged game designers.

Building 10 strelets at a time looks really impressive until you find out that they do half the damage of musketeers and have only two-thirds of the hit points. Still, they're really cheap, so they're the perfect rush unit. For those of you who don't play RTS games 24/7 as Tom does, know that when I call them "the perfect rush unit," I do not mean that they are a great Canadian art-rock band.

TOM: I retreat my settlers into the town center and call out my minutemen, a one-time defense force that quickly dies as 10 more strelets bring up the rear behind the initial 20. Next to die are my Iroquois, then my explorer, and then the three hussars I hastily trained, one of whom is gunned down before he even reaches the battle. After that, my dog dies. That's right. Bruce Geryk killed my dog. But after that, fortunately, Bruce gets spooked by how quickly my town center picks off his strelets; he pulls back after losing half of them.

BRUCE: I pull back to bring in five cossacks. Cossacks are actually not unique to Russia. In fact, the most famous cossacks in history were the Ukrainian (Zaporozhiye) cossacks, and there were Polish and Tatar cossacks as well. But whatever—the designers couldn't even spell "streltsy."



Tom's Iroquois mantlets launch a brief diversion.

TOM: Just as I sound the all-clear bell, Bruce is back with a mix of strelets and cossacks. I get five janissaries out by using a card. Janissaries are named after Janice, the goddess of having your ass saved at the last moment. I put them in hand-to-hand mode, and their scimitars cut down three of Bruce's cossacks while the town center continues to pick off strelets. I beat him into a stalemate and quickly get everyone back to work. Aladdin Chick gets himself up, dusts himself off, and heads north with a few hussars to grab trading posts and maybe a native settlement. I'm going to need all the help I can get, plus, it should be clear of Russians up there, since I doubt Bruce has had the time or resources to expand.

BRUCE: I really like the trading post deal in this game. Generating experience for having a goofy-looking wagon ride by your buildings so that you can use cards to bring dudes into the game is pretty cool. Knowing Tom, he's already got a bunch of these.

TOM: I've obtained the two northernmost trading posts, and my two outpost wagons just showed up from the Holy City. I leave one at my base and send another up north to cover my trading posts. Then my hussars mosey south to see how much of the trade route I can seize. I run into a lone Russian settler building a trading post. Having been unable to do much in the way of actually attacking yet, I happily slaughter her and commence tearing down the partially completed building.

BRUCE: Typical Tom—instead of letting me concentrate on destroying his buildings, he has to mess with my settlers and stuff.

TOM: Fortunately, I've got fishing boats out and about, and they're unmolested because strelets can't swim. My boats have been bringing in food, the only uninterrupted resource I've enjoyed. To make sure my fishermen remain unmolested, I use a card to enlist the Sea Rampart, a Turkish galley, from my home city. I send her along the coast and she runs into Bruce's dock and blows it up. The waters off New England will be mine! No cod or recreational sailing for Bruce!

▲ Tom's settlers take matters—and muskets—into their own hands.

BRUCE: Not only do I have to micromanage all my settlers and try to rush Tom, but I also have to worry about all kinds of naval maneuvers. I hate naval elements in RTS games because they don't scale well and are rarely well integrated. I was going to say that the naval element in *Age of Empires III* is actually pretty well done, but Tom is kicking my ass with it, so instead, I hate it.

TOM: Bruce has just hit the Fortress Age, which explains why he hasn't been attacking me; he was saving up the resources to age up. I've taken advantage of the lull to build a wall across his main approach so he'll have to come around from the north, past my defensive outposts and the Iroquois village where I'm marshalling defenders. I'm using the wood I won't need for a naval arms race to call in some Iroquois. And since I expect another attack, I use the Colonial Militia card, which gives my town centers a second round of powerful conscripted minutemen.

BRUCE: Tom's hastily built Maginot >

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO DON'T PLAY RTS GAMES 24/7 AS TOM DOES, KNOW THAT WHEN I CALL STRELETS "THE PERFECT RUSH UNIT," I DO NOT MEAN THAT THEY ARE A GREAT CANADIAN ART-ROCK BAND.

▲ When we say this party is a barn burner, we are not kidding. We are sorry for making a bad joke, though.

▲ Who knew the Lipizzaner Stallions made the trip to the New World?

Line doesn't hold me up for too long. After all, I have Hackapells, whatever they are. I also have my fearsome Scottish Highlanders with their 63(!) ranged attack, which is more than three times the power of a musketeer s.

TOM: I guess it didn't occur to me that Bruce would attempt to come through the wall. Who on earth just goes through a wall? You see a wall and your reaction is to go around, right? Bruce must be wired weird.

BRUCE: Tom must have been hoping his wall would obviate the need for defending himself with actual soldiers, which is what happens when you learn military lessons from the French. I do manage to kill a few meandering janissaries.

TOM: While waiting on my defenders to come back from the north where Bruce was supposed to have gone around the wall (seriously, who tries to come through a wall without at least bringing in some artillery first?), I use a card that gives me five Abus guns. These things are carried by some poor schmuck who drew the short straw and therefore gets to cart around a gun so ginormous that to fire it, you have to prop it up on a 16th-century bipod. "Abus" is the Turkish word for "something that hits you as hard as a Greyhound bus," which is what these guns do to enemy infantry. Unfortunately, Bruce rudely attacks my Abus guns with cavalry.

BRUCE: This is my big chance to cripple Tom. After taking out a defensive outpost and a few defenders, I basically have the run of the place. There are a bunch of juicy building targets around but not that many settlers. Settlers are everything in this game. Where are his settlers?

TOM: Fortunately, Bruce takes his time throwing Molotov cocktails at my stables instead of push ng further west, where I've got upward of 20 settlers gathering wood and coin. This gives me some time to trickle in defenses from the north, which does little more than distract him. But I manage to save up enough coin to pay for a two-pronged last-ditch defensive effort: my improved colonial militia and a mercenary card for 11 Barbary corsairs at my town center. Meanwhile, a handful of Iroquois mantlets—native siege units hiding behind big wooden shields—advance on his trading post.

BRUCE: Tom has recruited a swarm of shirtless pirates? Well, they're no match for Hackapells, in any event. Is that all of Tom's defense? Where are his settlers? He's fiddling around near my trading post, but even an RTS-challenged guy like me knows that when you're blowing up a guy's base, you don't stop because someone is bothering your beaver-pelt collectors.

TOM: Those were the worst pirates I've ever seen. I've lost them all, along with my tomahawks, hussars, and janissaries. He's destroyed my town center with grenadiers and shot my Iroquois mantlets with his musketeers. I'm all but finished if he finds my settlers.

BRUCE: Ah, so Tom has a bunch of settlers hanging out gathering wood. Well, OK then.

TOM: My settlers retreat to the coast, where they hastily build a stable and then start shooting back. Once some hussars start coming in, they start playing rock to the scissors of Bruce's infantry. It's been a grueling battle of attrition that I'm winning for a couple of reasons: 1) Although Bruce has pretty much destroyed my base, he's left most of my settlers untouched, so they've continued to work while the battle rages, and 2) my defenders don't have as far to travel as his reinforcements. So I've managed to age up. Aladdin Chick has headed north to build a second town center.

BRUCE: You get only one fort in this game, and I'm going to use mine to guard my trading post and the blockhouse that I'm using to keep the pressure on Tom's base. This should keep him from getting behind the force that's currently messing up his base. But he keeps training defenders by running his settlers off and then building stables and barracks just out of my line of sight.

TOM: Bruce is bringing out oprichniks, which are quickly knocking down my build ngs. I'm saving up for my Manchu mercenary card, which will put an end to that.

BRUCE: The oprichnina was Ivan the Terrible's combination reign of terror and land grab, in which he dispossessed landowners of their property and then killed them. This complicated real-life backstory is the reason "oprichniks" (basically Ivan's secret police) are good against settlers and buildings.

TOM: My Manchu have arrived! These 10 Chinese cavalry archers handily slaughter twice as many oprichn ks, then a handful of musketeers and a slew of strelets. I lose one Manchu in the process.

BRUCE: WTF are these things? Chinese dudes? Who researched this idea? I don't mind a little historical implausibility when it's my Scots and Russians driving the Ottoman Empire off the New England coast, because then, I'm winning. I'm even OK with shirtless pirates. But invincible Chinese warrior hacker guys? It's simply too much.

TOM: I've got a second base up to the north now. I've got nearly 50 villages and my economy is healthy despite the drubbing I took. My Manchu are riding down a few cossacks and keep ng Bruce off my back, and my explorer finds a Russian plantation. I work my way around the north, easily skirting Bruce's fort. My Manchu are accompanied by a force of 16 elite Iroquois tomahawks, the maximum allowed for controlling both native settlements. I fall on the plantation, slaughter the settlers, and drive back a force of musketeers and strelets. As I'm pressing forward toward the rest of his villagers, Bruce surrenders.

BRUCE: I've beaten Tom only once in a conventional real-time strategy game (*Warlords Battlecry III*), so I'm not too surprised that I lost this one. My biggest mistake was not making a point of going after his settlers. If you were to look at the settler graph, you'd see that I slowed Tom down but never really knocked him out. I have a lot of plateaus where I'm not building any settlers, and in this game, you always have to be building settlers. I'm going to go ahead and blame this on the limited pause function.

FINAL SCORE: The Stone Has Been Paused by Bruce.

I WAS GOING TO SAY THAT THE NAVAL ELEMENT IN *AGE OF EMPIRES III* IS ACTUALLY PRETTY WELL DONE. BUT TOM IS KICKING MY ASS WITH IT. SO INSTEAD, I HATE IT.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, BRUCE AND TOM

And their parents said it would never last!

FOUR YEARS?! YES, WHILE WE CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT OURSELVES, THIS ISSUE marks the four-year anniversary of the Tom vs. Bruce column, which began as a rather earnest set of strategy tips but has (d)evolved into regular accounts of us beating up on each other. In celebration of everyone's preoccupation with who's winning the war (and by "everyone," we mean "Tom?"), here's a look at some of our favorite battles, along with the latest overall tally.

JANUARY 2002: We kick off the series by showing the other three people who bought *Rails Across America* how to conduct a stock raid. Tom wins by uniting Mexico.

OCTOBER 2002: In *Age of Wonders II*, "The Chronicles of the War of Tom and Bruce do hereby record the defeat of Bruce's 'tornado-flung wizard.' In short, Bruce isn't in Kansas anymore.

NOVEMBER 2002: Bruce beats Tom in two out of three *Magic: The Gathering* games by using a green animal deck. Cries Tom: "First squirrels, then elephants. What is this, *Zoo Tycoon*?"

JANUARY 2003: Bruce wins two out of three matches of *Medieval: Total War*. In the final game, Bruce as Italy beats Tom as England, thus ruining England's chance to conquer a country with better cuisine.

JUNE 2003: Bruce and Tom enlist the guys behind Old Man Murray (www.oldmanmurray.com) to play *The Sims Online*. One of them wins by peeing on himself.

SEPTEMBER 2003: Tom's RTS dominance shows clearly in his *Rise of Nations* win, in which he surgically nukes Bruce into cultural irrelevancy.

NOVEMBER 2003: Tom hasn't played a war game since he kept a flock of seagulls cassette tape in his car. It is thus no surprise that Bruce wins the *Korsun Pocket* match.

FEBRUARY 2004: Bruce's Cthulhu monsters emerge from the sea to give Tom a beating in *Dominions II: The Ascension Wars*. Bruce also manages to spell Cthulhu correctly, several times. Cthulhu f'tagn!

APRIL 2004: In the virtual collectible card game *Star Chamber*, Tom recounts how to re-create a great naval battle at home: "Take an egg to represent Bruce's fleet. Now go outside and find a brick wall to represent my fleet. Then throw the egg at the brick wall." Somehow, Bruce still wins two out of the three games played.

JULY 2004: Tom's dwarven fisherman teams up with Bruce's elfin priest in the *World of WarCraft* beta. Says Bruce: "In the movies, dwarves are supposed to be comic relief, so I ask Tom to tell me a joke. All he can come up with is something about two gnomes and a farmer's pig. We can't print the punch line here, but I now know that dwarves aren't very funny."

AUGUST 2004: It's a *Rise of Nations* rematch, using the *Thrones & Patriots* expansion. Tom's Iroquois beat Bruce's Americans, move them onto reservations, and then allow them to open casinos.

NOVEMBER 2004: On the eve of the actual election, Tom and Bruce re-create themselves as candidates in *The Political Machine*. The Chick/Edwards Democratic ticket barely beats out the Geryk/Cheney Republican ticket, but Bruce manages to win California. "California, since you have betrayed me," Tom says in his victory speech, "I present you as a gift to Mexico."

MARCH 2005: *Sid Meier's Pirates!* inspires Tom to write his own sea chantey. Bruce takes one look at the dancing minigame and cedes the whole match.

OCTOBER 2005: Bruce wins the *Battlefield 2* match. Actually, Bruce's bots win the *Battlefield 2* match by covering for him while he makes a sandwich.

BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL WINS: Tom 19, Bruce 16

TOM'S BEST GENRE: Real-time strategy (10 wins, 4 losses)

BRUCE'S BEST GENRE: Turn-based strategy (10 wins, 3 losses)

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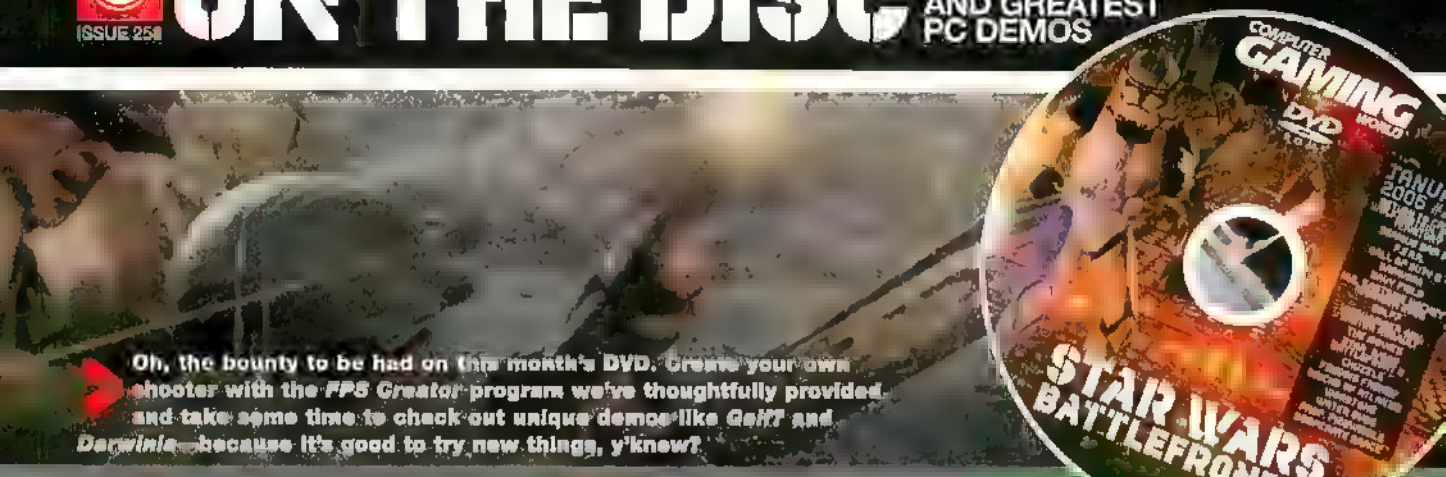
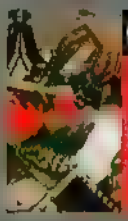
ISSUE 25

ON THE DISC

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PC DEMOS



Oh, the bounty to be had on this month's DVD. Create your own shooter with the *FPS Creator* program we've thoughtfully provided, and take some time to check out unique demos like *Golf!* and *Darwinia*—because it's good to try new things, y'know?

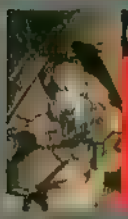


WARHAMMER 40,000: WINTER ASSAULT

Why did the new *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* expansion win a CGW Editors' Choice award last month? Looks like you get to find out!

SERIOUS SAM II

What's that itch? Could it be... your trigger finger, or perhaps those of 15 of your closest friends? Go on, scratch it!



F.E.A.R.

Shoot 'em up with 16 PLAYERS or capture the F.L.A.G. in this multiplayer DEMO. Also, check out our REVIEW in this issue.

CALL OF DUTY 2

We get it: you like to try before you buy—how very fiscally responsible of you. We wish to reward your economic wisdom with another look at *Call of Duty 2*.

NAVY FIELD

Make revisionist history by fighting important battles from World War II with this massively multiplayer tactical war demo.

DARWINIA

We'd be bummed if this real-time strategy game ended up becoming one of those tragically overlooked gems. We're giving you the demo so you'll see how cool it is.

GOLF!

Curious indeed!

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

Have you finished this month's *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* cover story? Well, after you do, you can check out Splash Damage's first entry in this franchise, and maybe have some ice cream if you're good.

NHL EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER 2005

Six simulated months of managerial experience, at your fingertips.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

Space combat, playable Jedi, and a galaxy far, far away. Check out the trailer!

THE MOVIES

These trailers from Peter Molyneux's studio simulator give you a taste of life in the director's chair.

CHUZZLE

Chuzzles have escaped into the real world. Oh, the humanity!

FEEDING FRENZY

Eat your way to the top of the food chain on your way to unseating the vicious Shark King.

BRICKS OF ATLANTIS

Bust your way through the crazy levels of Atlantis and harness the power of Poseidon.

WORDJONG

Mah-jongg solitaire + word-building exercises = the ultimate word-puzzle game. Go figure.

WATER BUGS

Damn those crazy cosmic bugs!

PROFESSOR FIZZWIZZLE

Help Professor Fizzwizzle use gadgets to solve puzzles.

DESPERATE SPACE

Save lost civilian ships, earn tons of cash, buy powerful upgrades, and smash alien scum into oblivion.

BATTLEFIELD 2 MAP: STRIKE AT KARKAND 2

Check out mapmaker Jarel Illingworth's unofficial sequel to the fan-favorite *Battlefield 2* map Strike at Karkand.

"AND MORE AMAZING CRAP FROM CGW!"

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ARE YOU THERE, GOD? IT'S ME, ROBERT

When your PC dies, does it go to heaven? It better not

WHEN I WAS A LAD, MY DARLING MOTHER HAD A LITTLE saying: "Do that again and I'll smother you in your sleep." This little pearl of parenting did wonders for improving my vodka and Pall Mall retrieval times, and though it didn't quell the grumbling in my stomach, it certainly silenced the grumbling escaping my lips. Sadly, no amount of similar caring works on a computer. Tender entreaties, outright threats, and physical violence won't either. You'd think that repeatedly striking that $3,000 doorstop dominating your desktop with a wireless keyboard until the keyboard shatters and scatters every Function key around the room would do the trick, but trust me on this, it doesn't. You can't throttle it into submission with a mouse cord either. Dealing with a PC has invalidated every lesson learned at my mother's knee except one: Everything dies (though my beloved mater was fond of appending "And you might be next" to this life lesson).

You know why they call them computer terminals? Because they're inherently terminal. They die. At the most inconvenient times and in the worst ways imaginable. Horrible, ugly, profanity-inducing violence-triggering deaths. And unlike you and me, they do take it with them, every document, save game, music file, and downloaded Internet, uh, art film passing blithely into the great beyond clutched in their awful silicon claws. Frankly, I think they enjoy it. I know mine did. I heard it laughing. Malicious, mocking bastard. I gave it my heart, it gave me angina.

All I wanted was a little fun. And some rudimentary utility. I naively expected my PC to behave like other tools in the house, to perform as expected when expected and meeting expectations the same way my hammer and toaster (when used separately—believe you me, I learned that lesson) did. I wanted to turn it on and have it work. That's it.

I should have known better. Like every baby bunny rabbit I have tried to teach to swim, my computers, each and every one, have died hideously after a sad, tortured existence. But this last one took it to a new Lifetime movie-of-the-week level. First off, it never worked quite right, but who, I reasoned, among us does? That was my first mistake, anthropomorphizing this slab of steel and melted sand into something sentient, a fellow traveler on life's highway, forgiving its flaws as I felt sure it forgave mine.

But that occasional sputter became a chronic stutter, which became a pronounced limp, which became a desperate need for an iron lung, and within a few months I was doing more work than it was. I certainly wasn't playing games much anymore—I was playing triage. As things kept locking up and crashing, I'd futilely struggle, sidestep, and cheat my way past the problems because a simple reboot was anything but. Powering down my briefly golden child meant a prolonged boot sequence of 30 minutes—if I was lucky and it powered back up at all.

And it went downhill from there, with new symptoms, brief recoveries, vicious relapses, and so on until finally it needed a transplant. A drastic step to be sure, but after confirming the diagnosis with well-qualified second opinions, I swapped out the motherboard and it roared back to life. I beamed, as proud and happy as that time I replaced a drifter's chest wall with stapled-on skirt steak. A week later it was abruptly and irredeemably dead. And so was the PC. It's that false sense of triumph and hope, like a hobo's seemingly animated jig that only later you realize was a ghoulish fit of last-gasp agony, that makes the inevitable demise just that much crueler.

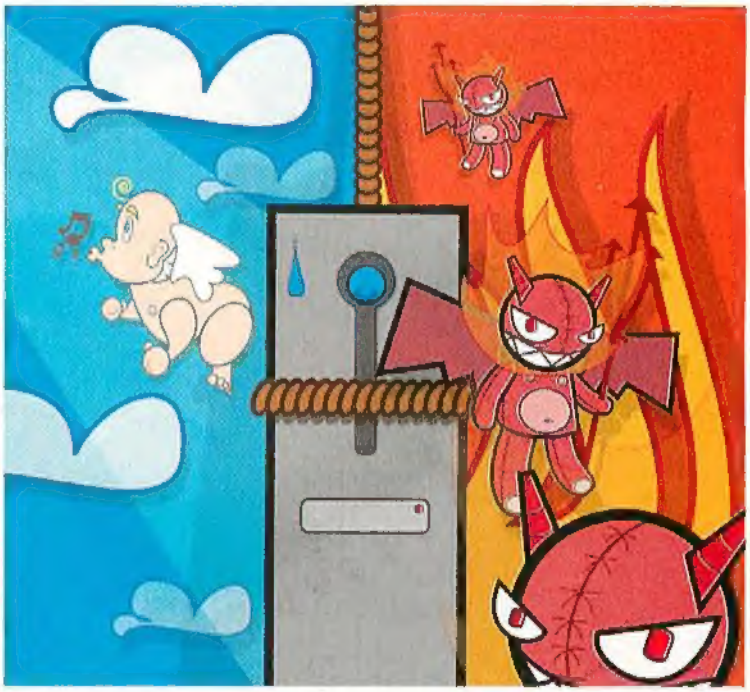

ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN DALLASKO

> LIKE EVERY BABY BUNNY RABBIT I HAVE TRIED TO TEACH TO SWIM, MY COMPUTERS HAVE DIED HIDEOUSLY.

Do you want to know the real reason you keep hearing that PC gaming is dying? Because the PCs keep dying, that's why. I have about five hundred and a half zillion consoles in my house and they work just fine. I stick a game in, it loads, and I play it. And in the rare instance my GBA or PS2 stops working, the answer is simple: It's broken, just like my toasterfied hammer. It's not because I have a bad module of RAM, or the hard drive has a corrupt partition, or the power supply isn't powerful enough, or the drivers conflict with cosmic winds, or I need to reset the CMOS and maybe wipe the hard drives and do a complete Windows reinstall in some excruciating and perverted version of "being safe," it's just broken, and all I need do is buy a new one or invoke my warranty. That's it, no exploratory surgery and costly experiments.

You know, I have a typewriter in my garage that works perfectly fine. I have board games and playing cards and an imagination and actual physical activity and awkward social interaction to fill my leisure time. And apparently, there are these things called "stores" that not only will let me buy the same things I get from Amazon.com, but will let me take them home right when I pay for them instead of mailing them to me days later. We don't really need computers, and in fact, our lives would be immeasurably better and less stressful if we simply stopped trusting them and investing so much of our hearts and time in them. It's time to cut the (power) cord.

I should have my new PC by Monday. I'm sure it'll be different this time./ **Robert Coffey**

Computer Gaming World (ISSN 0744-6667) is published monthly except for a combined Jul/Aug issue by Ziff Davis Media, Inc., 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY 10016. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Ride along enclosed in MLCD, PSCD, UBCD, USCD and USCS editions. Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80322-7167. Canadian GST registration number is 865286033. Publication Mail Agreement No. 40002221. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to PO Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4R6. Printed in the U.S.A.

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